The Project Gutenberg EBook of Saint Augustin, by Louis Bertrand

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most

other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions

whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of

the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at

www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have

to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.

Title: Saint Augustin

Author: Louis Bertrand

Posting Date: September 25, 2014 [EBook #9069]

Release Date: October, 2005

First Posted: September 2, 2003

Language: English

\*\*\* START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAINT AUGUSTIN \*\*\*

Produced by Charles Aldorondo, Tiffany Vergon, William

Flis, and Distributed Proofreaders

SAINT AUGUSTIN

BY

LOUIS BERTRAND

TRANSLATED BY VINCENT O'SULLIVAN

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The quotations from Saint Augustin's \_Confessions\_ are taken from Canon

Bigg's scholarly version, which seems to me the best in English. But there

are places where M. Bertrand's reading of the original text differs from

Dr. Bigg's, and in such cases I have felt myself obliged to follow the

author of this book. These differences never seriously affect the meaning

of a passage; sometimes it is a mere matter of choice, as with the word

\_collactaneum\_ (i, 7) which Dr. Bigg translates "twin," and M. Bertrand,

like Pusey, \_frère de lait\_, or "foster-brother." As a rule, Dr. Bigg

chooses the quietest terms, and M. Bertrand the most forcible. Those

curious in such matters may like to see an instance.

The original text runs:--

Avulsa a latere meo tanquam impedimento conjugii, cum quâ cubare

solitus eram, cor ubi adhaerebat, concisum et vulneratum mihi erat, et

trahebat sanguinem.

(\_Confessiones\_, vi, 15.)

M. Bertrand translates:--

Quand on arracha de mes flancs, sous prétexte qu'elle empêchait mon

mariage, celle avec qui j'avais coutume de dormir, depuis si longtemps,

là où mon coeur était attaché au sien, il se déchira, et je traînais

mon sang avec ma blessure.

Canon Bigg's version is:--

My mistress was torn from my side as an obstacle to my marriage, and my

heart, which clung to her, was torn and wounded till it bled.

In this place, it will be observed that Dr. Bigg does not emphasize the

word \_ubi\_ which, as the reader will find on turning to page 185 of this

volume, M. Bertrand thinks so significant.

The remaining English versions of the writings of Saint Augustin and of the

other Latin authors quoted are my own, except the passages from \_The City

of God\_, including the verse translation of Persius, which are taken,

with some necessary alterations, from the Seventeenth century translation

ascribed to John Healey.

V. O'S.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

PROLOGUE

THE FIRST PART

DAYS OF CHILDHOOD

I. AN AFRICAN FREE-TOWN SUBJECT TO ROME

II. THE FAMILY OF A SAINT

III. THE COMFORT OF THE MILK

IV. THE FIRST GAMES

V. THE SCHOOLBOY OF MADAURA

VI. THE HOLIDAYS AT THAGASTE

THE SECOND PART

THE ENCHANTMENT OF CARTHAGE

I. CARTHAGO VENERIS

II. THE AFRICAN ROME

III. THE CARTHAGE STUDENT

IV. THE SWEETNESS OF TEARS

V. THE SILENCE OF GOD

THE THIRD PART

THE RETURN

I. THE CITY OF GOLD

II. THE FINAL DISILLUSION

III. THE MEETING BETWEEN AMBROSE AND AUGUSTIN

IV. PLANS OF MARRIAGE

V. THE CHRIST IN THE GARDEN

THE FOURTH PART

THE HIDDEN LIFE

I. THE LAST SMILE OF THE MUSE

II. THE ECSTASY OF SAINT MONNICA

III. THE MONK OF THAGASTE

IV. AUGUSTIN A PRIEST

THE FIFTH PART

THE APOSTLE OF PEACE AND OF CATHOLIC UNITY

I. THE BISHOP OF HIPPO

II. WHAT WAS HEARD IN THE BASILICA OF PEACE

III. THE BISHOP'S BURTHEN

IV. AGAINST "THE ROARING LIONS"

THE SIXTH PART

FACE TO FACE WITH THE BARBARIANS

I. THE SACK OF ROME

II. THE CITY OF GOD

III. THE BARBARIAN DESOLATION

IV. SAINT AUGUSTIN

INDEX

SAINT AUGUSTIN

PROLOGUE

Inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.

"Our heart finds no rest until it rests in Thee."

\_Confessions\_, I, i.

Saint Augustin is now little more than a celebrated name. Outside of

learned or theological circles people no longer read him. Such is true

renown: we admire the saints, as we do great men, on trust. Even his

\_Confessions\_ are generally spoken of only from hearsay. By this neglect,

is he atoning for the renewal of glory in which he shone during the

seventeenth century, when the Jansenists, in their inveterate obstinacy,

identified him with the defence of their cause? The reputation of sour

austerity and of argumentative and tiresome prolixity which attaches to

the remembrance of all the writers of Port-Royal, save Pascal--has that

affected too the work of Augustin, enlisted in spite of himself in the

ranks of these pious schismatics? And yet, if there have ever been any

beings who do not resemble Augustin, and whom probably he would have

attacked with all his eloquence and all the force of his dialectic, they

are the Jansenists. Doubtless he would have said with contempt: "The party

of Jansen," even as in his own day, with his devotion to Catholic unity, he

said: "The party of Donatus."

It must be acknowledged also that the very sight of his works is

terrifying, whether we take the enormous folios in two columns of the

Benedictine edition, or the volumes, almost as compact, and much more

numerous, of recent editions. Behind such a rampart of printed matter he is

well defended against profane curiosity. It needs courage and perseverance

to penetrate into this labyrinth of text, all bristling with theology and

exegesis and metaphysics. But only cross the threshold of the repellent

enclosure, grow used to the order and shape of the building, and it will

not be long ere you are overcome by a warm sympathy, and then by a steadily

increasing admiration for the host who dwells there. The hieratic face

of the old bishop lights up, becomes strangely living, almost modern, in

expression. You discover under the text one of the most passionate lives,

most busy and richest in instruction, that history has to shew. What it

teaches is applicable to ourselves, answers to our interests of yesterday

and to-day. This existence, and the century in which it was passed, recall

our own century and ourselves. The return of similar circumstances has

brought similar situations and characters; it is almost our portrait. And

we feel half ready to conclude that at the present moment there is no

subject more actual than St. Augustin.

At least he is one of the most interesting. What, indeed, is more romantic

than this wandering life of rhetorician and student that the youthful

Augustin led, from Thagaste to Carthage, from Carthage to Milan and to

Rome--begun in the pleasures and tumult of great cities, and ending in the

penitence, the silence, and recollection of a monastery? And again, what

drama is more full of colour and more profitable to consider than that last

agony of the Empire, of which Augustin was a spectator, and, with all his

heart faithful to Rome, would have prevented if he could? And then, what

tragedy more stirring and painful than the crisis of soul and conscience

which tore his life? Well may it be said that, regarded as a whole, the

life of Augustin was but a continual spiritual struggle, a battle of the

soul. It is the battle of every moment, the never-ceasing combat of body

and spirit, which the poets of that time dramatized, and which is the

history of the Christian of all times. The stake of the battle is a soul.

The upshot is the final triumph, the redemption of a soul.

What makes the life of Augustin so complete and so truly typical is that

he fought the good fight, not only against himself, but against all the

enemies of the Church and the Empire. If he was a doctor and a saint, so

was he too the type of the man of action in one of the most disheartened

periods. That he triumphed over his passions--this, in truth, concerns only

God and himself. That he preached, wrote, shook crowds, disturbed minds,

may seem without importance to those who reject his doctrine. But that

across the centuries his soul, afire with charity, continues to warm our

own; that without our knowledge he still shapes us; and that, in a way

more or less remote, he is still the master of our hearts, and, in certain

aspects, of our minds--there is what touches each and all of us, without

distinction. Not only has Augustin always his great place in the living

communion of all christened people, but the Western soul is marked with the

stamp of his soul.

First of all, his fate is confused with that of the dying Empire. He

witnessed, if not the utter disappearance, at least the gradual swooning

away of that admirable thing called the Roman Empire, image of Catholic

unity. Well, we are the wreckage of the Empire. Usually, we turn away with

contempt from those wretched centuries which underwent the descents of the

Barbarians. For us, that is the Lower-Empire, a time of shameful decadence

which deserves nothing but our scorn. However, it is out of this chaos

and this degradation that we have arisen. The wars of the Roman republic

concern us less than the outlawry of the Barbarian chiefs who separated our

Gaul from the Empire, and without knowing it, prepared the dawn of France.

After all, what are the rivalries of Marius and Sylla to us? The victory of

Aëtius over the Huns in the plains of Chalons concerns us a good deal more.

Further, it is unfair to the Lower-Empire to view it only as a time of

feebleness and cowardice and corruption. It was also an epoch of immense

activity, prolific of daring and high-flying adventurers, some of them

heroic. Even the most degenerate of the last Emperors never lost the

conviction of Roman majesty and grandeur. Unto the very end, they employed

all the ruses of their diplomacy to prevent the Barbarian chiefs from

imagining themselves anything else but vassals of the Empire. Honorius, at

bay in Ravenna, persisted in refusing Alaric the title of commander of the

\_Cohortes Urbanæ\_, even though his refusal were to lead to the sack of Rome

and imperil his own life.

Simply by his fidelity to the Empire, Augustin shews himself one like

ourselves--a Latin of Occitania. But still closer resemblances draw him

near to us. His time was very like our own time. Upon even a slight

familiarity with his books we recognize in him a brother-soul who has

suffered, felt, thought, pretty nearly like us. He came into an ending

world, on the eve of the great cataclysm which was going to carry away an

entire civilization--a tragic turning-point of history, a time troubled and

often very grievous, which was hard to live in for all, and to even the

most determined minds must have appeared desperate. The peace of the Church

was not yet settled; consciences were divided. People hesitated between the

belief of yesterday and the belief of to-morrow. Augustin was among those

who had the courage to choose, and who, having once chosen their faith,

proclaimed it without weakening. The belief of a thousand years was dying

out, quenched by a young belief to which was promised an eternal duration.

How many delicate souls must have suffered from this division, which cut

them off from their traditions and obliged them, as they thought, to be

false to their dead along with the religion of their ancestors! All the

irritations which the fanatics of to-day inflict upon believing souls, many

must have had to suffer then. The sceptics were infused by the intolerance

of the others. But the worst (even as it is to-day) was to watch the

torrent of foolishness which, under cover of religion, philosophy, or

miracle-working, pretended to the conquest of mind and will. Amid this mass

of wildest doctrines and heresies, in this orgy of vapid intellectualism,

they had indeed solid heads who were able to resist the general

intoxication. And among all these people talking nonsense, Augustin appears

admirable with his good sense.

This "intellectual," this mystic, was not only a man of prayer and

meditation. The prudence of the man of action and the administrator

balanced his outbursts of dialectical subtility, often carried too far. He

had that sense of realities such as we flatter ourselves that we have; he

had a knowledge of life and passion. Compared to the experience of, say,

Bossuet, how much wider was Augustin's! And with all that, a quivering

sensitiveness which is again like our own--the sensitiveness of times of

intense culture, wherein the abuse of thought has multiplied the ways of

suffering in exasperating the desire for pleasure. "The soul of antiquity

was rude and vain." It was, above all, limited. The soul of Augustin is

tender and serious, eager for certainties and those enjoyments which do

not betray. It is vast and sonorous; let it be stirred ever so little, and

from it go forth deep vibrations which render the sound of the infinite.

Augustin, before his conversion, had the apprehensions of our Romantics,

the causeless melancholy and sadness, the immense yearnings for "anywhere

but here," which overwhelmed our fathers. He is really very close to us.

He has broadened our Latin souls by reconciling us with the Barbarian. The

Latin, like the Greek, only understood himself. The Barbarian had not the

right to express himself in the language of the Empire. The world was split

into two parts which endeavoured to ignore each other, Augustin has made us

conscious of the nameless regions, the vague countries of the soul, which

hitherto had lain shrouded in the darkness of barbarism. By him the union

of the Semitic and the Occidental genius is consummated. He has acted as

our interpreter for the Bible. The harsh Hebraic words become soft to our

ears by their passage through the cultivated mouth of the rhetorician. He

has subjugated us with the word of God. He is a Latin who speaks to us of

Jehovah.

Others, no doubt, had done it before him. But none had found a similar

emotion, a note of tenderness so moving. The gentle violence of his charity

wins the adherence of hearts. He breathes only charity. After St. John, it

is he who is the Apostle of Love.

His tireless voice dominated the whole of the West. The Middle Ages still

heard it. For centuries his sermons and treatises were copied over and

over again; they were repeated in cathedrals, commented in abstracts of

theology. People came to accept even his theory of the fine arts. All that

we have inherited from the ancients reaches us through Augustin. He is the

great teacher. In his hands the doctrinal demonstration of the Catholic

religion takes firm shape. To indicate the three great stages of the onward

march of the truth, one may say: Jesus Christ, St. Paul, St. Augustin.

Nearest to our weakness is the last. He is truly our spiritual father. He

has taught us the language of prayer. The words of Augustin's prayers are

still upon the lips of the devout.

This universal genius, who during forty years was the speaking-trumpet of

Christendom, was also the man of one special century and country. Augustin

of Thagaste is the great African.

Well may we be proud of him and adopt him as one of our glories--we who

have kept up, for now almost a century, a struggle like to that which

he maintained for the unity of the Roman Empire, we who consider Africa

as an extension of France. More than any other writer, he has expressed

the temperament and the genius of his country. This motley Africa, with

its eternal mixture of races at odds with one another, its jealous

sectarianism, the variety of its scenery and climate, the violence

of its sensations and passions, its seriousness of character and its

quick-changing humour, its mind at once practical and frivolous, its

materialism and its mysticism, its austerity and its luxury, its

resignation to servitude and its instincts of independence, its hunger

to rule--all that comes out with singularly vivid touches in the work of

Augustin. Not only was he his country's voice, but, as far as he could, he

realized its old dream of dominion. The supremacy in spiritual matters that

Carthage disputed so long and bitterly with Rome, it ended by obtaining,

thanks to Augustin. As long as he lived, the African Church was the

mistress of the Churches of the West.

As for me--if I may venture to refer to myself in such a matter--I have had

the joy to recognize in him, besides the Saint and Teacher whom I revere,

the ideal type of the Latin of Africa. The image of which I descried the

outline long ago through the mirages of the South in following the waggons

of my rugged heroes, I have seen at last become definite, grow clear, wax

noble and increase to the very heaven, in following the traces of Augustin.

And even supposing that the life of this child of Thagaste, the son of

Monnica, were not intermingled so deeply with ours, though he were for us

only a foreigner born in a far-off land, nevertheless he would still remain

one of the most fascinating and luminous souls who have shone amid our

darkness and warmed our sadness--one of the most human and most divine

creatures who have trod our highways.

THE FIRST PART

DAYS OF CHILDHOOD

Sed delectabat ludere.

"Only, I liked to play."

\_Confessions\_, I, 9.

I

AN AFRICAN FREE-TOWN SUBJECT TO ROME

Little streets, quite white, which climb up to clay-formed hills deeply

furrowed by the heavy winter rains; between the double row of houses,

brilliant in the morning sun, glimpses of sky of a very tender blue; here

and there, in the strip of deep shade which lies along the thresholds,

white figures crouched upon rush-mats--indolent outlines, draped with

bright colours, or muffled in rough and sombre wool-stuffs; a horseman who

passes, bent almost in two in his saddle, the big hat of the South flung

back over his shoulders, and encouraging with his heel the graceful trot of

his horse--such is Thagaste as we see it to-day, and such undoubtedly it

appeared to the traveller in the days of Augustin.

Like the French town built upon its ruins, the African free-city lay in a

sort of plain taken between three round hills. One of them, the highest

one, which is now protected by a \_bordj\_, must have been defended in old

days by a \_castellum\_. Full-flowing waters moisten the land. To those

coming from the stony regions about Constantine and Setif, or the vast bare

plain of the Medjerda, Thagaste gives an impression of freshness and cool.

It is a laughing place, full of greenery and running water. To the Africans

it offers a picture of those northern countries which they have never seen,

with its wooded mountains covered by pines and cork trees and ilex. It

presents itself as a land of mountain and forest--especially forest. It is

a hunter's country. Game is plentiful there--boar, hare, redwing, quail,

partridge. In Augustin's time, wild beasts were apparently more numerous in

the district than they are to-day. When he compares his adversaries, the

Donatists, to roaring lions, he speaks like a man who knows what a lion is.

To the east and west, wide stretches of woodland, rounded hill-summits,

streams and torrents which pour through the valleys and glens--there

you have Thagaste and the country round about--the world, in fact, as

it revealed itself to the eyes of the child Augustin. But towards the

south the verdure grows sparse; arid mountain-tops appear, crushed down

as blunted cones, or jutted in slim Tables of the Law; the sterility

of the desert becomes perceptible amid the wealth of vegetation. This

full-foliaged land has its harsh and stern localities. The African light,

however, softens all that. The deep green of the oaks and pines runs into

waves of warm and ever-altering tints which are a caress and a delight for

the eye. A man has it thoroughly brought home to him that he is in a land

of the sun.

To say the least, it is a country of strongly marked features which affords

the strangest contrast with the surrounding districts. This wooded Numidia,

with its flowing brooks, its fields where the cattle graze, differs in the

highest degree from the Numidia towards Setif--a wide, desolate plain,

where the stubble of the wheat-fields, the sandy \_steppes\_, roll away in

monotonous undulations to the cloudy barrier of Mount Atlas which closes

the horizon. And this rough and melancholy plain in its turn offers a

striking contrast with the coast region of Boujeiah and Hippo, which is not

unlike the Italian Campania in its mellowness and gaiety. Such clear-cut

differences between the various parts of the same province doubtless

explain the essential peculiarities of the Numidian character. The bishop

Augustin, who carried his pastoral cross from one end to the other of this

country, and was its acting and thinking soul, may perhaps have owed to it

the contrasts and many-sidedness of his own rich nature.

Of course, Thagaste did not pretend to be a capital. It was a free-town of

the second or third order; but its distance from the great centres gave it

a certain importance. The neighbouring free-towns, Thubursicum, Thagura,

were small. Madaura and Theveste, rather larger, had not perhaps the same

commercial importance. Thagaste was placed at the junction of many Roman

roads. There the little Augustin, with other children of his age, would

have a chance to admire the out-riders and equipages of the Imperial

Mail, halted before the inns of the town. What we can be sure of is that

Thagaste, then as now, was a town of passage and of traffic, a half-way

stopping-place for the southern and coast towns, as well as for those of

the Proconsulate and Numidia. And like the present Souk-Ahras, Thagaste

must have been above all a market. Bread-stuffs and Numidian wines were

bartered for the flocks of the Aures, leather, dates, and the esparto

basket-work of the regions of Sahara. The marbles of Simitthu, the

citron-wood of which they made precious tables, were doubtless handled

there. The neighbouring forests could furnish building materials to the

whole country. Thagaste was the great mart of woodland Numidia, the

warehouse and the bazaar, where to this day the nomad comes to lay in a

stock of provisions, and stares with childish delight at the fine things

produced by the inventive talent of the workers who live in towns.

Thus images of plenty and joy surrounded the cradle of Augustin. The smile

of Latin beauty welcomed him also from his earliest steps. It is true that

Thagaste was not what is called a fine city. The fragments of antiquity

which have been unearthed there are of rather inferior workmanship. But how

little is needed to give wings to the imagination of an intelligent child!

At all events, Thagaste had a bathing-hall paved with mosaics and perhaps

ornamented with statues; Augustin used to bathe there with his father.

And again, it is probable that, like the neighbouring Thubursicum and

other free-cities of the same level, it had its theatre, its forum, its

nymph-fountains, perhaps even its amphitheatre. Of all that nothing

has been found. Certain inscribed stone tablets, capitals and shafts

of columns, a stone with an inscription which belonged to a Catholic

church--that is all which has been discovered up to this present time.

Let us not ask for the impossible. Thagaste had columns--nay, perhaps a

whole street between a double range of columns, as at Thimgad. That would

be quite enough to delight the eyes of a little wondering boy. A column,

even injured, or scarcely cleansed from wrack and rubbish, has about it

something impressive. It is like a free melody singing among the heavy

masses of the building. To this hour, in our Algerian villages, the mere

sight of a broken column entrances and cheers us--a white ghost of beauty

streaming up from the ruins among the modern hovels.

There were columns at Thagaste.

II

THE FAMILY OF A SAINT

It was in this pleasant little town, shaded and beautified for many years

now by the arts of Rome, that the parents of Augustin lived.

His father, Patricius, affords us a good enough type of the Romanized

African. He belonged to the order of \_Decuriones\_, to the "very brilliant

urban council of Thagaste" (\_splendidissimus ordo Thagastensis\_), as an

inscription at Souk-Ahras puts it. Although these strong epithets may be

said to be part of the ordinary official phraseology, they indicate, just

the same, the importance which went with such a position. In his township,

Patricius was a kind of personage. His son assures us that he was poor, but

we may suspect the holy bishop of exaggerating through Christian humility.

Patricius must certainly have owned more than twenty-five acres of land,

for this was made a condition of being elected to the \_curia\_. He had

vineyards and orchards, of which Augustin later on recalled the plentiful

and sweet-tasting fruits. In short, he lived in considerable style. It

is true that in Africa household expenses have never at any time been a

great extravagance. Still, the sons of Patricius had a pedagogue, a slave

specially engaged to keep them under his eye, like all the children of

families comfortably off.

It has been said that as Augustin's father was a member of the \_curia\_,

he must have been a ruined man. The Decurions, who levied taxes and made

themselves responsible for their collection, were obliged to supply any

deficiency in the revenue out of their own money. Patricius, it is thought,

must have been one of the numerous victims of this disastrous system. But

no doubt there were a good many exceptions. Besides, there is nothing in

Augustin's reminiscences which authorizes us to believe that his father

ever knew embarrassment, to say nothing of actual poverty. What seems by

far the most probable is that he lived as well as he could upon the income

of his estate as a small country landowner. In Africa people are satisfied

with very little. Save for an unusually bad year following a time of long

drought, or a descent of locusts, the land always gives forth enough to

feed its master.

To hunt, to ride horseback, now and then to go on parade, to look after

his small-holders and agricultural slaves, to drive one of those bargains

in which African cunning triumphs--such were the employments of Patricius.

In short, he drifted through life on his little demesne. Sometimes this

indolent man was overcome by a sudden passion for work; or again he was

seized by furious rages. He was violent and brutal. At such moments he

struck out right and left. He would even have hit his wife or flogged the

skin off her back if the quietude of this woman, her dignity and Christian

mildness, had not overawed him. Let us not judge this kind of conduct by

our own; we shall never understand it. The ancient customs, especially the

African customs, were a disconcerting mixture of intense refinement and

heedless brutality.

That is why it will not do to exaggerate the outbursts of Patricius, which

his son mentions discreetly. Although he may not have been very faithful to

his wife, that was in those days, more than in ours, a venial sin in the

eyes of the world. At heart the African has always longed for a harem in

his house; he inclines naturally to the polygamy of Muslemism. In Carthage,

and elsewhere, public opinion was full of indulgence for the husband who

allowed himself liberties with the serving-women. People laughed at it, and

excused the man. It is true they were rather harder on the matron who took

the same kind of liberty with her men-slaves. However, that went on too.

The Bishop of Hippo, in his sermons, strongly rebuked the Christian married

couples for these frequent adulteries which were scarcely regarded as

errors.

Patricius was a pagan, and this partly explains his laxity. It would

doubtless be going too far to say that he remained faithful to paganism

all his life. It is not likely that this urban councillor of Thagaste was

a particularly assured pagan. Speculative and intellectual considerations

made a very moderate appeal to him. He was not an arguer like his son. He

was pagan from habit, from that instinctive conservatism of the citizen

and landowner who sticks obstinately to his class and family traditions.

Prudence and diplomacy had also something to do with it. Many great

landlords continued to defend and practise paganism, probably from motives

similar to those of Patricius himself. As for him, he had no desire to get

wrong with the important and influential people of the country; he might

have need of their protection to save his small property from the ravenous

public treasury. Moreover, the best-paid posts were still controlled by the

pagan priesthood. And so Augustin's father thought himself very wise in

dealing cautiously with a religion which was always so powerful, and

rewarded its adherents so well.

But for all that, it is undeniable that paganism about this time was in an

awkward position from a political point of view. The Government eyed it

with disapproval. Since the death of Constantine, the "accursed emperors"

had waged against it a furious war. In 353, just before the birth of

Augustin, Constantius promulgated an edict renewing the order for the

closing of the temples and the abolition of sacrifices--and that too under

pain of death and confiscation. But in distant provinces, such as Numidia,

the action of the central power was slow and irregular. It was often

represented by officials who were hostile or indifferent to Christianity.

The local aristocracy and their following scoffed at it more or less

openly. In their immense villas, behind the walls of their parks, the rich

landowners offered sacrifices and organized processions and feasts as

if there were no law at all. Patricius knew all that. And, on the other

side, he could take note of the encroachments of the new religion. During

the first half of the fourth century Thagaste had been conquered by the

Donatists. Since the edict of Constans against these schismatics, the

inhabitants of the little city had come back to Catholicism out of fear of

the severity of the imperial government. But the settlement was far from

being complete and final. As a consequence of the edict, the whole region

of the Aures had been in revolution. The Bishop of Bagai, fortified in

his episcopal city and basilica, had stood an actual siege from the Roman

troops. Almost everywhere the struggle between Donatists and Catholics

still went on below the surface. There cannot be the least doubt that

Thagaste took its share in these quarrels. To those who urged him to be

baptized, the father of Augustin might well answer with ironic politeness:

"I am only waiting till you agree among yourselves, to see where the truth

lies." In his heart this rather lukewarm pagan had no inveterate dislike to

Christianity.

What proves it at once is that he married a Christian.

How did Monnica become the wife of Patricius? How did these two beings, so

little alike, between whom there was such a great difference of age, not to

mention all the rest, come to join their fate? Those are questions which

it would never have occurred to the people of Thagaste to ask. Patricius

married to be like everybody else--and also because he was well over forty,

and his mother an old woman who would soon be no longer able to run his

house.

Monnica also had her mother. The two old women had a meeting, with many

politenesses and ceremonious bowings, and because the thing appeared to

them reasonable and most suitable, they settled the marriage. Had Patricius

ever seen the girl that he was going to take, according to custom, so as to

have a child-bearer and housewife? It is quite likely he had not. Was she

pretty, rich, or poor? He considered such matters as secondary, since the

marriage was not a love-match but a traditional duty to fulfil. If the

union was respectable, that was quite enough. But however the matter fell

out, what is certain is that Monnica was very young. She was twenty-two

when Augustin was born, and he was probably not her first child. We know

that she was hardly marriageable when she was handed over, as Arab parents

do to-day with their adolescent or little girls, to the man who was going

to marry her. Now in Africa girls become marriageable at a very early age.

They are married at fourteen, sometimes even at twelve. Perhaps she was

seventeen or eighteen at most when she married Patricius. She must have had

first a son, Navigius, whom we shall meet later on at Milan, and also a

daughter, of whom we do not even know the name, but who became a nun, and

superior of a convent in the diocese of Hippo. For us the features of these

two other children of Monnica and Patricius are obliterated. They are

concealed by the radiance of their illustrious great brother.

Monnica was fond of telling stories of her girlhood to her son. He has

handed down some of them to us.

She was brought up strictly, according to the system of that time. Both her

parents came of families which had been Christian, and Catholic-Christian,

for many generations. They had never been carried away by the Donatist

schism; they were people very obstinate in their convictions--a character

quite as frequent in Africa as its opposite, the kind of Numidian or Moor,

who is versatile and flighty. It is not unimportant that Augustin came from

this hard-headed race, for this it was, with the aid of God's grace, that

saved him--the energetic temper of his will.

Still, if the faith of the young Monnica was confirmed from her earliest

years, it is not so much to the lessons of her mother that she owed it,

as to the training of an old woman-servant of whom she always spoke with

gratitude. In the family of her master, this old woman had a place like the

one which to-day in a Turkish family is held by the nurse, the \_dada\_, who

is respected by all the harem and all the household. Doubtless she herself

was born in the house and had seen all the children born. She had carried

Monnica's father on her back when he was little, just as the Kabylian

women or the Bedouin nomads carry their babies still. She was a devoted

slave, just a bit unreasonable--a veritable housedog who in the zeal of

guardianship barks more than is necessary at the stranger who passes. She

was like the negress in the Arab houses to-day, who is often a better

Muslem, more hostile to the Christian, than her employers. The old woman

in Monnica's family had witnessed the last persecutions; she had perhaps

visited the confessors in prison; perhaps she had seen flow the blood of

the martyrs. These exciting and terrible scenes would have been graven on

her memory. What inflamed stories the old servant must have told her young

mistresses, what vital lessons of constancy and heroism! Monnica listened

to them eagerly.

Because of her great faith, this simple slave was revered as a saint by

her owners, who entrusted her with the supervision of their daughters. She

proved a stern governess, who would stand no trifling with her rules. She

prevented these girls from drinking even water except at meals. Cruel

suffering for little Africans! Thagaste is not far from the country of

thirst. But the old woman said to them:

"You drink water now because you can't get at the wine. In time to come,

when you are married and have bins and cellars of your own, you'll turn up

your nose at water, and your habit of drinking will be too much for you."

Monnica came near fulfilling the prophecy of the honest woman. It was

before she was married. As she was very well-behaved and very temperate,

she used to be sent to the cellar to draw the wine from the cask. Before

pouring it into the flagon she would sip just a little. Being unaccustomed

to wine, she was not able to drink more; it was too strong for her gullet.

She did this, not because she liked the wine, but from naughtiness, to play

a trick on her parents who trusted her, and also, of course, because it was

prohibited. Each time she swallowed a little more, and so it went on till

she ended by finding it rather nice, and came to drinking greedily one

cup after another. One day a slave-girl, who went with her to the cellar,

began to grumble. Monnica gave her a sharp answer. Upon this the girl

called Monnica a drunkard.... Drunkard! This bitter taunt so humiliated the

self-respect of the future saint, that she got the better of her taste for

drink. Augustin does not say it was through piety she did this, but because

she felt the ugliness of such a vice.

There is a certain roughness in this story of childhood, the roughness of

ancient customs, with which is always mingled some decency or dignity.

Christianity did the work of polishing the soul of Monnica. At the time we

are dealing with, if she was already a very devout young girl, she was far

as yet from being the grand Christian that she became afterwards.

When she married Patricius she was a girl very reserved and cold to all

appearances (in reality, she was very passionate), precise in attending to

her religious duties, even a little strict, with her exaggeration of the

Christian austerity in her hate of all the brutalities and all the careless

morals that paganism condoned. Nevertheless, this rigid soul knew how to

bend when it was necessary. Monnica had tact, suppleness, and, when it

was needed, a very acute and very reasonable practical sense of which she

gave many a proof in the bringing up and management of her son Augustin.

This soul, hard for herself, veiled her uncompromising religion under an

unchangeable sweetness which was in her rather the work of grace than a

natural gift.

There can be little doubt that her behaviour and character greatly

disturbed Patricius at the beginning of their married life. Perhaps he

regretted the marriage. What use had he for this nun alongside of him!

Both of them must have suffered the usual annoyances which always appeared

before long in unions of this kind between pagan and Christian. True, it

was no longer the time of Tertullian, the heroic century of persecutions,

when the Christian women glided into the prisons to kiss the shackles of

the martyrs. (What a revenge did woman take then for her long and enforced

confinement to the women's apartments! And how outrageous such conduct must

have seemed to a husband brought up in the Roman way!) But the practices

of the Christian life established a kind of intermittent divorce between

husbands and wives of different religion. Monnica often went out, either

alone, or accompanied by a faithful bondwoman. She had to attend the

services of the Church, to go about the town visiting the poor and giving

alms. And there were the fast-days which occurred two or three times a

week, and especially the long fast of Lent--a grievous nuisance when the

husband wanted to give a dinner-party just on those particular days! On

the vigil of festivals, Monnica would spend a good part of the night in

the Basilica. Regularly, doubtless on Sundays, she betook herself to the

cemetery, or to some chapel raised to the memory of a martyr who was often

buried there--in fact, they called these chapels "Memorials" (\_memoriæ\_).

There were many of these chapels--even too many in the opinion of austere

Christians. Monnica went from one to another carrying in a large basket

made of willow branches some pieces of minced meat, bread, and wine mixed

with water. She met her friends in these places. They would sit down around

the tombs, of which some were shaped like tables, unpack the provisions,

and eat and drink piously in honour of the martyr. This was a residue

of pagan superstition among the Christians. These pious \_agapæ\_, or

love-feasts, often turned into disgusting orgies. When Augustin became

Bishop of Hippo he had considerable trouble to get his people out of the

habit of them. Notwithstanding his efforts, the tradition still lasts.

Every Friday the Muslem women keep up the custom of visiting the cemeteries

and the marabouts. Just as in the time of St. Monnica, they sit around the

tombs, so cool with their casing of painted tiles, in the shade of the

cypress and eucalyptus. They gobble sweetmeats, they gossip, they laugh,

they enjoy themselves--the husbands are not there.

Monnica made these visits in a really pious state of mind, and was far

from trying to find in them opportunities for lewdness or carouse. She was

content to drink a little wine very carefully--she always bore in mind her

youthful sin. Besides, this wine weakened with water that she brought from

the house, was tepid by the time she reached the cemetery; it would be a

drink of very moderate relish, little likely to stimulate the senses. She

distributed what was left of it among the needy, together with the contents

of her basket, and came back modestly to her house.

But however staid and reserved she might be, still these outings gave rise

to scandalous talk. They annoyed a suspicious husband. All the Africans are

that. Marital jealousy was not invented by Islam. Moreover, in Monnica's

time men and women took part in these funeral love-feasts and mingled

together disturbingly. Patricius got cross about it, and about a good many

other things too. His old mother chafed his suspicions by carrying to

him the ugly gossip and even the lies of the servants about his wife. By

dint of patience and mildness and attentions, Monnica ended by disarming

her mother-in-law and making it clear that her conduct was perfect. The

old woman flew into a rage with the servants who had lied to her, and

denounced them to her son. Patricius, like a good head of a household, had

them whipped to teach them not to lie any more. Thanks to this exemplary

punishment, and the good sense of the young wife, peace reigned once more

in the family.

Women, friends of Monnica, were amazed that the good understanding was

not oftener upset, at least in an open manner, between husband and wife.

Everybody in Thagaste knew the quick-tempered and violent character of

Patricius. And yet there were no signs that he beat his wife. Nor did

any one say he did. Other women who had less passionate husbands were

nevertheless beaten by them. When they came to Monnica's house they shewed

her the marks of the whacks they had got, their faces swollen from blows,

and they burst out in abuse of men, clamouring against their lechery,

which, said these matrons, was the cause of the ill-treatment they had to

endure.

"Blame your own tongue," retorted Monnica.

According to her, women should close their eyes to the infidelities of

their husbands and avoid arguing with them when they were angry. Silence,

submissiveness, were the all-powerful arms. And since, as a young woman,

she had a certain natural merriment, she added, laughing:

"Remember what was read to you on your wedding-day. You were told that you

are the handmaids of your husbands. Don't rebel against your masters!..."

Possibly this was a keen criticism of the pagan code, so hard in its rules.

Still, in this matter, the Roman law was in agreement with the Gospel.

Sincere Christian as she was, the wife of Patricius never had any quarrel

with him on account of his infidelities. So much kindness and resignation

touched the dissolute and brutal husband, who besides was an excellent

man and warm-hearted. The modesty of his wife, after a while, made her

attractive in his eyes. He loved her, so to speak, on the strength of

his respect and admiration for her. He would indeed have been a churl to

find fault with a wife who interfered with him so little and who was a

perfect housekeeper, as we shall see later on when we come to her life at

Cassicium. In one point, where even she did not intend it, she forwarded

the interests of her husband by gaining him the good-will of the Christians

in Thagaste; while he, on his side, could say to the pagans who looked

askance at his marriage: "Am I not one of yourselves?"

In spite of all the differences between him and Monnica, Patricius was a

contented husband.

III

THE COMFORT OF THE MILK

Augustin came into this world the thirteenth of November of the year of

Christ 354.

It was just one little child more in this sensual and pleasure-loving

Africa, land of sin and of carnal productiveness, where children are

born and die like the leaves. But the son of Monnica and Patricius was

predestined: he was not to die in the cradle like so many other tiny

Africans.

Even if he had not been intended for great things, if he had been only a

head in the crowd, the arrival of this baby ought, all the same, to affect

us, for to the Christian, the destiny of the obscurest and humblest of

souls is a matter of importance. Forty years afterwards, Augustin, in his

\_Confessions\_, pondered this slight ordinary fact of his birth, which

happened almost unnoticed by the inhabitants of Thagaste, and in truth it

seems to him a great event, not because it concerns himself, bishop and

Father of the Church, but because it is a soul which at this imperceptible

point of time comes into the world.

Let us clearly understand Augustin's thought. Souls have been ransomed by a

Victim of infinite value. They have themselves an infinite value. Nothing

which goes on in them can be ignored. Their most trifling sins, their

feeblest stirrings towards virtue, are vital for the eternity of their lot.

All shall be attributed to them by the just Judge. The theft of an apple

will weigh perhaps as heavily in the scales as the seizure of a province

or a kingdom. The evil of sin is in the evil intention. Now the fate

of a soul, created by God, on Him depends. Hence everything in a human

life assumes an extreme seriousness and importance. In the history of a

creature, all is worthy of being examined, weighed, studied, and perhaps

also, for the edification of others, told.

Here is an altogether new way of regarding life, and, proceeding from that,

of understanding art. Even as the slaves, thanks to Christianity, came into

the spiritual city, so the most minute realities by this outlook are to be

included in literature. The \_Confessions\_ will be the first model of the

art of the new era. A deep and magnificent realism, because it goes even

to the very depths of the divine--utterly distinct, at any rate, from

our surface realism of mere amusement--is about to arise from this new

conception. Without doubt, in Augustin's eyes, beauty dwells in all things,

in so far forth as beauty is a reflection of the order and the thought

of the Word. But it has also a more essential character--it has a moral

signification and value. Everything, in a word, can be the instrument of

the loss or the redemption of a soul. The most insignificant of our actions

reverberates to infinitude on our fate. Regarded from this point, both

things and beings commence to live a life more closely leagued together and

at the same time more private; more individual and more general. All is in

the lump, and nevertheless all is separate. Our salvation concerns only

ourselves, and yet through charity it becomes involved with the salvation

of our fellows.

In this spirit let us look at the cradle of Augustin. Let us look at it

with the eyes of Augustin himself, and also, perchance, of Monnica. Bending

over the frail body of the little child he once was, he puts to himself

all the great desperate questions which have shaken humanity for thousands

of years. The mystery of life and death rises before him, formidable. It

tortures him to the point of anguish, of confusion: "Yet suffer me to speak

before Thy mercy, me who am but dust and ashes. Yea, suffer me to speak,

for, behold, I speak not to man who scorns me, but to Thy mercy. Even Thou

perhaps dost scorn me, but Thou wilt turn and have pity. For what is it

that I would say, O Lord my God, save that I know not whence I came hither

into this dying life, shall I call it, or living death?... And, lo, my

infancy has long been dead, and I live. But Thou, O Lord, who ever livest

and in whom nothing ever dies--tell me, I beseech Thee, O God, and have

mercy on my misery, tell me whether another life of mine died before my

infancy began."

One is reminded here of Pascal's famous prosopopoeia: "I know not who

has put me into the world, nor what the world is, nor myself. I am in a

terrible ignorance about everything.... All I know is that I must soon die,

but what I know least of all is this very death which I cannot escape."

The phrases of the \_Pensées\_ are only the echo of the phrases of the

\_Confessions\_. But how different is the tone! Pascal's charge against human

ignorance is merciless. The God of Port-Royal has the hard and motionless

face of the ancient Destiny: He withdraws into the clouds, and only shews

Himself at the end to raise up His poor creature. In Augustin the accent

is tender, trusting, really like a son, and though he be harassed, one can

discern the thrill of an unconquerable hope. Instead of crushing man under

the iron hand of the Justice-dealer, he makes him feel the kindness of the

Father who has got all ready, long before its birth, for the feeble little

child: "The comforts of Thy pity received me, as I have heard from the

father and mother of my flesh.... And so the comfort of woman's milk was

ready for me. For my mother and my nurses did not fill their own bosoms,

but Thou, O Lord, by their means gavest me the food of infancy, according

to Thy ordinance...."

And see! his heart overflows at this remembrance of his mother's milk. The

great doctor humbles his style, makes it simple and familiar, to tell us of

his first mewlings, and of his baby angers and joys. He too was a father;

he knew what is a new-born child, and a young mother who gives it suck,

because he had seen that with his own eyes close beside him. All the small

bothers which mingle with the pleasures of fatherhood he had experienced

himself. In his own son he studied himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

This child, born of a Christian mother, and who was to become the great

defender of the faith, was not christened at his birth. In the early

Church, and especially in the African Church, it was not usual to do so.

The baptismal day was put as far off as possible, from the conviction that

the sins committed after the sacrament were much more serious than those

which went before. The Africans, very practical folk, clearly foresaw that

they would sin again even after baptism, but they wanted to sin at a better

rate, and lessen the inflictions of penance. This penance in Augustin's

time was far from being as hard as in the century before. Nevertheless, the

remembrance of the old severity always remained, and the habit was taken to

put off baptism so as not to discourage sinners overmuch.

Monnica, always sedulous to conform with the customs of her country and

the traditions of her Church, fell in with this practice. Perhaps she may

have had also the opposition of her husband to face, for he being a pagan

would not have cared to give too many pledges to the Christians, nor to

compromise himself in the eyes of his fellow-pagans by shewing that he

was so far under the control of Christian zealots as to have his child

baptized out of the ordinary way. There was a middle course, and this was

to inscribe the child among the catechumens. According to the rite of the

first admission to the lowest order of catechumens, the sign of the cross

was made on Augustin's forehead, and the symbolic salt placed between his

lips. And so they did not baptize him. Possibly this affected his whole

life. He lacked the baptismal modesty. Even when he was become a bishop, he

never quite cast off the old man that had splashed through all the pagan

uncleannesses. Some of his words are painfully broad for chaste ears. The

influence of African conditions does not altogether account for this. It is

only too plain that the son of Patricius had never known entire virginity

of soul.

They named him Aurelius Augustinus. Was Aurelius his family name? We cannot

tell. The Africans always applied very fantastically the rules of Roman

nomenclature. Anyhow, this name was common enough in Africa. The Bishop of

Carthage, primate of the province and a friend of Augustin, was also called

Aurelius. Pious commentators have sought to find in this name an omen of

Augustin's future renown as an orator. They have remarked that the word

\_aurum\_, gold, is contained in Aurelius--a prophetic indication of the

golden mouth of the great preacher of Hippo.

Meanwhile, he was a baby like any other baby, who only knew, as he tells

us, how to take his mother's breast. However, he speaks of nurses who

suckled him; no doubt these were servants or slaves of the household.

They gave him their milk, like those Algerian women who, to-day, if their

neighbour is called away, take her child and feed it. Besides, with them

children are weaned much later than with us. You can see mothers sitting at

their doors put down their work and call to a child of two or three playing

in the street for him to come and take the breast. Did Augustin remember

these things? At least he recalled his nurses' games, and the efforts they

made to appease him, and the childish words they taught him to stammer.

The first Latin words he repeated, he picked up from his mother and the

servants, who must also have spoken Punic, the ordinary tongue of the

populace and small trader class. He learned Punic without thinking about

it, in playing with other children of Thagaste, just as the sons of our

colonists learn Arab in playing with little boys who wear chechias on their

heads.

He is a Christian, a bishop, already a venerated Father, consulted by the

whole Catholic world, and he tells us all that. He tells it in a serious

and contrite way, with a manifest anxiety to attribute to God, as the sole

cause, all the benefits which embellished his childhood, as well as to

deplore his faults and wretchedness, fatal consequence of the original

Fall. And still, we can make out clearly that these suave and far-off

memories have a charm for him which he cannot quite guard himself against.

The attitude of the author of the \_Confessions\_ is ambiguous and a little

constrained. The father who has loved his child, who has joined in his

games, struggles in him against the theologian who later on was to uphold

the doctrine of Grace against the heretics. He feels that he must shew, not

only that Grace is necessary for salvation and that little children ought

to be baptized, but that they are capable of sinning. Yes, the children sin

even at nurse. And Augustin relates this story of a baby that he had seen:

"I know, because I have seen, jealousy in a babe. It could not speak, yet

it eyed its foster-brother \_with pale cheeks and looks of hate\_." Children

are already men. The egoism and greediness of the grown man may be already

descried in the newly born.

However, the theologian of Grace was not able to drive from his mind

this verse of the Gospel: \_Sinite ad me parvulos venire\_--"Suffer little

children to come unto Me." But he interprets this in a very narrow sense,

luring it into an argument which furthers his case. For him, the small

height of children is a symbol of the humility without which no one can

enter God's kingdom. The Master, according to him, never intended us to

take children as an example. They are but flesh of sin. He only drew from

their littleness one of those similitudes which He, with His fondness for

symbols, favoured.

Well, let us dare to say it: Augustin goes wrong here. Such is the penalty

of human thought, which in its justest statements always wounds some

truth less clear or mutilates some tender sentiment. Radically, Augustin

is right. The child is wicked as man is. We know it. But against the

relentlessness of the theologian we place the divine gentleness of Christ:

"Suffer little children to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of

God."

IV

THE FIRST GAMES

"I loved to play," Augustin says, in telling us of those far-off years.

Is it surprising if this quick and supple intelligence, who mastered

without effort, and as if by instinct, the encyclopædic knowledge of his

age, who found himself at his ease amidst the deepest abstractions, did, at

the beginning, take life as a game?

The amusements of the little Africans of to-day are not very many, nor very

various either. They have no inventive imagination. In this matter their

French playfellows have taught them a good deal. If they play marbles, or

hopscotch, or rounders, it is in imitation of the \_Roumis\_. And yet they

are great little players. Games of chance attract them above all. At these

they spend hour after hour, stretched out flat on their stomachs in some

shady corner, and they play with an astonishing intensity of passion. All

their attention is absorbed in what they are about; they employ on the game

all the cunning of their wits, precociously developed, and so soon stuck

fast in material things.

When Augustin recalls the games of his childhood, he only mentions "nuts,"

handball, and birds. To capture a bird, that winged, light, and brilliant

thing, is what all children long to do in every country on earth. But in

Africa, where there are plenty of birds, big people as well as little

love them. In the Moorish cafés, in the wretchedest \_gourbis\_, cages made

of reeds are hung on the walls, all rustling with trills and fluttering

of wings. Quail, thrushes, nightingales are imprisoned in them. The

nightingale, the singing-bird beyond all others, so difficult to tame, is

the honoured guest, the privileged dweller in these rustic cages. With

the rose, he is an essential part of Arab poetry. The woods round about

Thagaste were full of nightingales. Not the least doubt that the child

Augustin had felt the little musical throats of these singing-birds throb

between his hands. His sermons, his heaviest treatises, have a recollection

of them. He draws from them an evidence in favour of the creating Word who

has put beauty and harmony everywhere. In the song of the nightingale he

finds, as it were, an echo of the music of the spheres.

If he loved birds, as a poet who knows not that he is a poet, did he love

as well to play at "nuts"? "Nuts," or thimble-rigging, is only a graceful

and crafty game, too crafty for a dreaming and careless little boy. It

calls for watchfulness and presence of mind. Grown men play at it as well

as children. A step of a staircase is used as a table by the players, or

the pavement of a courtyard. Three shells are laid on the stone and a

dried pea. Then, with rapid baffling movements, hands brown and alert fly

from one shell to another, shuffle them, mix them up, juggle the dried

pea sometimes under this shell, sometimes under that,--and the point is

to guess which shell the pea has got under. By means of certain astute

methods, an artful player can make the pea stick to his fingers, or to the

inside of the shell, and the opponent loses every time. They cheat with a

calm shamelessness. Augustin cheated too--which did not prevent him from

bitterly denouncing the cheating of his fellow-players.

The truth is, that he would not have quite belonged to his country if he

had not lied and stolen now and then. He lied to his tutor and to his

schoolmasters. He stole at his parents' table, in the kitchen, and in the

cellar. But he stole like a man of quality, to make presents and to win

over his playfellows: he ruled the other boys by his presents--a noteworthy

characteristic in this future ruler of souls. Morals like these, a little

rough, shape free and bold natures. Those African children were much less

coddled, much less scolded, than to-day. Monnica had something else to do

than to look after the boys. So for them it was a continual life in the

open air, which makes the body strong and hard. Augustin and his companions

should be pictured as young wild-cats.

This roughness came out strong at games of ball, and generally at all

the games in which there are two sides, conquerors and prisoners, or

fights with sticks and stones. Stone-throwing is an incurable habit

among the little Africans. Even now in the towns our police are obliged

to take measures against these ferocious children. In Augustin's time,

at Cherchell, which is the ancient \_Cæsarea Mauretaniæ\_, the childish

population was split into two hostile camps which stoned each other. On

certain holidays the fathers and big brothers joined the children; blood

flowed, and there were deaths.

The bishop Augustin recalls with severity the "superb victories" he won in

jousts of this kind. But I find it hard to believe that such a delicate

child (he was sickly almost all his life) could have got much pleasure out

of these brutal sports. If he was drawn into them by the example of others,

it must have been through the imagination they appealed to him. In these

battles, wherein sides took the field as Romans against Carthaginians,

Greeks against Trojans, he believed himself Scipio or Hannibal, Achilles

or Hector. He experienced beforehand, as a rhetorician, the intoxication

of a triumph which playfellows who were stronger and better provided with

muscles gave him a hard fight for. He did not always get the upper hand,

except perhaps when he bribed the enemy. But an eager young soul, such

as he was, can hardly be content with half-victories; he wants to excel.

Accordingly, he sought his revenge in those games wherein the mind has the

chief part. He listened to stories with delight, and in his turn repeated

them to his little friends, thus trying upon an audience of boys that charm

of speech by which later he was to subdue crowds. They also played at

acting, at gladiators, at drivers and horses. Some of Augustin's companions

were sons of wealthy citizens who gave splendid entertainments to their

fellow-countrymen. As these dramatic representations, or games of the

arena or circus, drew near, the little child-world was overcome by a

fever of imitation. All the children of Thagaste imitated the actors, the

\_mirmillones\_, or the horsemen in the amphitheatre, just as the young

Spaniards of to-day imitate the \_toreros\_.

In the midst of these amusements Augustin fell ill; he had fever and

violent pains in the stomach. They thought he was going to die. It appears

that it was himself who in this extreme situation asked for baptism.

Monnica was making all haste to have the sacrament administered, when

suddenly, against all expectation, the child recovered. Again was baptism

postponed, and from the same reason: to lessen the gravity of the sins

which young Augustin was bound to commit. His mother, who no doubt foresaw

some of them, again fell in with the custom.

It is possible that Patricius interfered this time in a more decided way.

Just at this period Catholicism was in an unfavourable situation. The

short reign of Julian had started a violent pagan reaction. Everywhere

the temples were reopening, the sacrifices beginning again. Moreover,

the Donatists secretly aided the pagans. Their \_Seids\_, more or less

acknowledged, the Circoncelliones, bands of fanatical peasants, scoured

through the Numidian country, attacking the Catholics, ravaging and

pillaging, and burning their farms and villas. Was this a good time to

make a noisy profession of faith, to be enrolled among the ranks of the

conquered party?

Little Augustin knew nothing of all these calculations of motherly prudence

and fatherly diplomacy: he begged for baptism, so he tells us. This seems

very remarkable in so young a child. But he lived in a house where all the

service was done by Christians. He heard the talk of Monnica's friends;

perhaps, too, of his grandparents, who were Catholics faithful and austere.

And then, his soul was naturally religious. That explains everything:

he asked for baptism to be like grown-up people, and because he was

predestined. Among children, the chosen have these sudden flashes of light.

At certain moments they feel what one day they shall be. Anyhow, Monnica

must have seen this sign with joy.

He got well, and took up again his little boy's life, divided between play,

and dawdling, and school.

School! painful memory for Augustin! They sent him to the \_primus

magister\_, the elementary teacher, a real terror, armed with a long switch

which came down without pity on idle boys. Seated on benches around him, or

crouched on mats, the boys sang out all together: "One and one are two, two

and two are four"--horrible refrain which deafened the whole neighbourhood.

The school was often a mere shed, or a \_pergola\_ in the fields which was

protected fairly well from sun and rain by cloths stretched overhead--a hut

rented for a trifle, wide open to the winds, with a mosquito-net stretched

out before the entrance. All who were there must have frozen in winter

and broiled in summer. Augustin remembered it as a slaves' chain-prison

(\_ergastulum\_) of boyhood.

He hated school and what they taught there--the alphabet, counting, and

the rudiments of Latin and Greek grammar. He had a perfect horror of

lessons--of Greek above all. This schoolboy, who became, when his turn

came, a master, objected to the methods of school. His mind, which grasped

things instinctively at a single bound, could not stand the gradual

procedure of the teaching faculty. He either mastered difficulties at

once, or gave them up. Augustin was one of the numerous victims of the

everlasting mistake of schoolmasters, who do not know how to arrange

their lessons to accord with various kinds of mind. Like most of those

who eventually become great men, he was no good as a pupil. He was often

punished, thrashed--and cruelly thrashed. The master's scourge filled

him with an unspeakable terror. When he was smarting all over from cuts

and came to complain to his parents, they laughed at him or made fun of

him--yes, even the pious Monnica. Then the poor lad, not knowing whom to

turn to, remembered hearing his mother and the servants talk of a Being,

very powerful and very good, who defends the orphan and the oppressed. And

he said from the depths of his heart:

"O my God, please grant that I am not whipped at school."

But God did not hear his prayer because he was not a good boy. Augustin was

in despair.

It is evident that these punishments were cruel, because forty years

afterwards he denounces them with horror. In his mind, they are tortures

comparable to the wooden horse or the iron pincers. Nothing is small

for children, especially for a sensitive child like Augustin. Their

sensitiveness and their imagination exaggerate all things out of due

measure. In this matter, also, schoolmasters often go wrong. They do not

know how to handle delicate organizations. They strike fiercely, when a

few words said at the right moment would have much more effect on the

culprit.... Monnica's son suffered as much from the rod as he took pride

in his successes at games. If, as Scipio, he was filled with a sensation

of glory in his battles against other boys, no doubt he pictured himself

a martyr, a St. Laurence or St. Sebastian, when he was swished. He never

pardoned--save as a Christian--his schoolmasters for having brutalized him.

Nevertheless, despite his hatred for ill-ordered lessons, his precocious

intelligence was remarked by everybody. It was clear that such lucky gifts

should not be neglected. Monnica, no doubt, was the first to get this into

her head, and she advised Patricius to make Augustin read for a learned

profession.

The business of the \_curia\_ was not exactly brilliant, and so he may have

perceived that his son might raise their fortunes if he had definite

employment. Augustin, a professor of eloquence or a celebrated pleader,

might be the saviour and the benefactor of his family. The town councils,

and even the Imperial treasury, paid large salaries to rhetoricians. In

those days, rhetoric led to everything. Some of the professors who went

from town to town giving lectures made considerable fortunes. At Thagaste

they pointed with admiration to the example of the rhetorician Victorinus,

an African, a fellow-countryman, who had made a big reputation over-seas,

and had his statue in the Roman Forum. And many years before, had not M.

Cornelius Fronto, of Cirta, another African, become the tutor of Marcus

Aurelius, who covered him with honours and wealth and finally raised him to

the Consulship? Pertinax himself, did he not begin as a simple teacher of

grammar, and become Proconsul of Africa and then Emperor of Rome? How many

stimulants for provincial ambition!...

Augustin's parents reasoned as the middle-class parents of to-day. They

discounted the future, and however hard up they were, they resolved to

make sacrifices for his education. And as the schools of Thagaste were

inadequate, it was decided to send this very promising boy to Madaura.

V

THE SCHOOLBOY OF MADAURA

A new world opened before Augustin. It was perhaps the first time he had

ever gone away from Thagaste.

Of course, Madaura is not very far off; there are about thirty miles at

most between the two towns. But there are no short journeys for children.

This one lay along the military road which ran from Hippo to Theveste--a

great Roman causeway paved with large flags on the outskirts of towns, and

carefully pebbled over all the rest of the distance. Erect upon the high

saddle of his horse, Augustin, who was to become a tireless traveller

and move about ceaselessly over African roads during all his episcopal

life--Augustin got his first glimpse of the poetry of the open road, a

poetry which we have lost for ever.

How amusing they were, the African roads of those days, how full of sights!

Pauses were made at inns with walls thick as the ramparts of citadels,

their interiors bordered by stables built in arcades, heaped up with

travellers' packs and harness. In the centre were the trough and cistern;

and to the little rooms opening in a circle on to the balcony, drifted up

a smell of oil and fodder, and the noise of men and of beasts of burthen,

and of the camels as they entered majestically, curving their long necks

under the lintel of the door. Then there was talk with the merchants, just

arrived from the south, who brought news of the nomad countries, and had

stories to tell. And then, without hurrying, a start was made again for the

next stage. Long files of chariots were encountered carrying provisions to

soldiers garrisoned on the frontier, or the State-distributed corn of the

Roman people to the sea-ports; or again, from time to time, the \_lectica\_,

brought along by slaves or mules, of a bishop on a visitation; and then the

litter, with close-drawn curtains, of a matron or some great personage. Of

a sudden all pulled sharp to one side; the vehicles lined up on the edge of

the road; and there passed at full speed, in a cloud of dust, a messenger

of the Imperial Post....

Certainly this road from Hippo to Theveste was one of the busiest and most

picturesque in the province: it was one of its main arteries.

At first the look of the country is rather like the neighbourhood of

Thagaste. The wooded and mountainous landscape still spreads out its

little breast-shaped hills and its sheets of verdure. Here and there the

road skirts the deeply-ravined valley of the Medjerda. At the foot of the

precipitous slopes, the river can be heard brawling in a torrent over its

stony bed, and there are sharp descents among thickets of juniper and the

fringed roots of the dwarf-pines. Then, as the descent continues, the land

becomes thinner and spaces bare of vegetation appear oftener. At last, upon

a piece of tableland, Madaura comes into view, all white in the midst of

the vast tawny plain, where to-day nothing is to be seen but a mausoleum

in ruins, the remains of a Byzantine fortress, and vague traces vanishing

away.

This is the first rise of the great plain which declines towards Theveste

and the group of the Aures Mountains. Coming from the woodland country of

Thagaste, the nakedness of it is startling. Here and there, thin cows crop

starveling shrubs which have grown on the bank of some \_oued\_ run dry.

Little asses, turned loose, save themselves at a gallop towards the tents

of the nomads, spread out, black and hairy, like immense bats on the

whiteness of the land. Nearer, a woman's red \_haick\_ interposes, the single

stain of bright colour breaking the indefinite brown and grey of the plain.

Here is felt the harshness of Numidia; it is almost the stark spaces of

the desert world. But on the side towards the east, the architecture of

mountains, wildly sculptured, stands against the level reaches of the

horizon. Upon the clear background of the sky, shew, distinctly, lateral

spurs and a cone like to the mystic representation of Tanit. Towards the

south, crumbling isolated crags appear, scattered about like gigantic

pedestals uncrowned of their statues, or like the pipes of an organ raised

there to capture and attune the cry of the great winds of the \_steppe\_.

This country is characterized by a different kind of energy from Thagaste.

There is more air and light and space. If the plantation is sparse, the

beautiful shape of the land may be observed all the better. Nothing breaks

or lessens the grand effects of the light.... And let no one say that

Augustin's eyes cared not for all that, he who wrote after his conversion,

and in all the austerity of his repentance: "If sentient things had not a

soul, we should not love them so much."

It is here, between Madaura and Thagaste, during the eager years of youth,

that he gathered together the seeds of sensations and images which,

later on, were to burst forth into fiery and boiling metaphors in the

\_Confessions\_, and in his homilies and paraphrases of Holy Scripture. Later

on, he will not have the time to observe, or he will have lost the power.

Rhetoric will stretch its commonplace veil between him and the unceasing

springtide of the earth. Ambition will turn him away from those sights

which reveal themselves only to hearts unselfish and indifferent. Then,

later on, Faith will seize hold of him to the exclusion of all else. He

will no longer perceive the creation save at odd moments in a kind of

metaphysical dream, and, so to speak, across the glory of the Creator.

But in these youthful years all things burst upon him with extraordinary

violence and ecstasy. His undulled senses swallowed greedily the whole

banquet offered by this wide world to his hunger for pleasure. The fugitive

beauty of things and beings, with all their charms, revealed itself to

him in its newness: \_novissimarum rerum fugaces pulchritudines, earumque

suavitates\_. This craving for sensation will still exist in the great

Christian teacher, and betray itself in the warm and coloured figures

of his style. Of course, he was not as a worldly describer, who studies

to produce phrases which present an image, or arranges glittering

pictures--all such endeavours he knew nothing about. But by instinct, and

thanks to his warm African temperament, he was a kind of impressionist and

metaphysical poet.

If the rural landscape of Thagaste is reflected in certain passages--the

pleasantest and most well known--of the \_Confessions\_, all the intellectual

part of Augustin's work finds its symbolical commentary here in this arid

and light-splashed plain of Madaura. Like it, the thought of Augustin has

no shadows. Like it too, it is lightened by strange and splendid tints

which seem to come from far off, from a focal fire invisible to human eyes.

No modern writer has better praised the light--not only the immortal light

of the blessed, but that light which rests on the African fields, and

is on land and sea; and nobody has spoken of it with more amplitude and

wonder. The truth is, that in no country in the world, not even in Egypt,

in the rose-coloured lands of Karnak and Luxor, is the light more pure and

admirable than in these great bare plains of Numidia and the region of the

Sahara. Is there not enchantment for the eyes of the metaphysician in this

play of light, these nameless interfulgent colours which appear flimsy as

the play of thought? For the glowing floating haze is made of nothing--of

lines, of gleam, of unregulated splendour. And all this triumph of

fluctuating light and elusive colour is quenched with the sun, smoulders

into darkness, even as ideas in the obscure depths of the intelligence

which reposes....

Not less than this land, stern even to sadness, but hot and sumptuous, the

town of Madaura must have impressed Augustin.

It was an old Numidian city, proud of its antiquity. Long before the Roman

conquest, it had been a fortress of King Syphax. Afterwards, the conquerors

settled there, and in the second century of our era, Apuleius, the most

famous of its children, could state before a proconsul, not without pride,

that Madaura was a very prosperous colony. It is probable that this old

town was not so much Romanized as its neighbours, Thimgad and Lambesa,

which were of recent foundation and had been built all at once by decree of

the Government. But it may well have been as Roman as Theveste, a no less

ancient city, where the population was probably just as mixed. Madaura,

like Theveste, had its temples with pillars and Corinthian porticoes, its

triumphal arches (these were run up everywhere), its forum surrounded by a

covered gallery and peopled with statues. Statues also were very liberally

distributed in those days. We know of at least three at Madaura which

Augustin mentions in one of his letters: A god Mars in his heroic

nakedness, and another Mars armed from head to foot; opposite, the statue

of a man, in realistic style, stretching out three fingers to neutralize

the evil eye. These familiar figures remained very clear in the

recollection of Augustin. In the evening, or at the hour of the siesta, he

had stretched himself under their pedestals and played at dice or bones in

the cool shade of the god Mars, or of the Man with outstretched fingers.

The slabs of marble of the portico made a good place to play or sleep.

Among these statues, there was one perhaps which interested the lad and

stimulated all his early ambitions--that of Apuleius, the great man of

Madaura, the orator, philosopher, sorcerer, who was spoken of from one end

to the other of Africa. By dint of gazing at this, and listening to the

praises of the great local author, did the young scholar become aware of

his vocation? Did he have from this time a confused sort of wish to become

one day another Apuleius, a Christian Apuleius--to surpass the reputation

of this celebrated pagan? These impressions and admirations of youth have

always a more or less direct influence upon what use a boy makes of his

talents.

Be that as it will, Augustin could not take a step in Madaura without

running against the legend of Apuleius, who was become almost a divinity

for his fellow-countrymen. He was looked upon not only as a sage, but as

a most wily nigromancer. The pagans compared him to Christ--nay, put him

higher than Christ. In their view he had worked much more astonishing

miracles than those of Jesus or of Apollonius of Tyana. And people told the

extravagant stories out of his \_Metamorphoses\_ as real, as having actually

happened. Nothing was seen on all sides but wizards, men changed into

animals, animals, or men and women, under some spell. In the inns, a man

watched with a suspicious look the ways of the maidservant who poured out

his drink or handed him a dish. Perhaps some magic potion was mingled with

the cheese or bread that she was laying on the table. It was an atmosphere

of feverish and delirious credulity. The pagan madness got the better of

the Christians themselves. Augustin, who had lived in this atmosphere, will

later find considerable trouble in maintaining his strong common sense amid

such an overflow of marvels.

For the moment, the fantasy of tales filled him with at least as much

enthusiasm as the supernatural. At Madaura he lived in a miraculous world,

where everything charmed his senses and his mind, and everything stimulated

his precocious instinct for Beauty.

More than Thagaste, no doubt, Madaura bore the marks of the building

genius of the Romans. Even to-day their descendants, the Italians, are the

masons of the world, after having been the architects. The Romans were the

building nation above all others. They it was who raised and established

towns upon the same model and according to the same ideal as an oration

or a poem. They really invented the house, \_mansio\_, not only the shelter

where one lives, but the building which itself lives, which triumphs over

years and centuries, a huge construction ornamental and sightly, existing

as much--and perhaps more--for the delight of the eyes as for usefulness.

The house, the \_Town-with-deep-streets\_, perfectly ordered, were a great

matter of amazement for the African nomad--he who passes and never settles

down anywhere. He hated them, doubtless, as the haunts of the soldier and

the publican, his oppressors, but he also regarded them with admiration

mixed with jealousy as the true expression of a race which, when it entered

a country, planted itself for eternity, and claimed to join magnificence

and beauty to the manifestation of its strength. The Roman ruins which

are scattered over modern Algeria humiliate ourselves by their pomp--us

who flatter ourselves that we are resuming the work of the Empire and

continuing its tradition. They are a permanent reproach to our mediocrity,

a continual incitement to grandeur and beauty. Of course, the Roman

architecture could not have had on Augustin, this still unformed young

African, the same effect as it has to-day on a Frenchman or a man from

Northern Europe. But it is certain that it formed, without his knowledge,

his thought and his power of sensation, and extended for him the lessons of

the Latin rhetoricians and grammarians.

All that was not exactly very Christian. But from these early school years

Augustin got further and further away from Christianity, and the examples

he had under his eyes, at Madaura were hardly likely to strengthen him

in his faith. It was hardly an edifying atmosphere there for a Catholic

youth who had a lively imagination, a pleasure-loving temperament, and who

liked pagan literature. The greatest part of the population were pagans,

especially among the aristocrats. The Decurions continued to preside at

festivals in honour of the old idols.

These festivals were frequent. The least excuse was taken to engarland

piously the doors of houses with branches, to bleed the sacrificial pig,

or slaughter the lamb. In the evening, squares and street corners were

illuminated. Little candles burned on all the thresholds. During the

mysteries of Bacchus, the town councillors themselves headed the popular

rejoicings. It was an African carnival, brutal and full of colour. People

got tipsy, pretended they were mad. For the sport of the thing, they

assaulted the passers and robbed them. The dull blows on tambourines, the

hysterical and nasal preludes of the flutes, excited an immense elation, at

once sensual and mystic. And all quieted down among the cups and leather

flagons of wine, the grease and meats of banquets in the open air. Even in

a country as sober as Africa, the pagan feasts were never much else than

excuses for gorging and orgies. Augustin, who after his conversion had only

sarcasms for the carnival of Madaura, doubtless went with the crowd, like

many other Christians. Rich and influential people gave the example. There

was danger of annoying them by making a group apart. And then, there was no

resisting the agreeableness of such festivals.

Perhaps he was even brought to these love-feasts by those in whose charge

he was. For, in fact, to whom had he been entrusted? Doubtless to some

host of Patricius, a pagan like himself. Or did he lodge with his master,

a grammarian, who kept a boarding-house for the boys? Almost all these

schoolmasters were pagan too. Is it wonderful that the Christian lessons

of Monnica and the nurses at Thagaste became more and more blurred in

Augustin's mind? Many years after, an old Madaura grammarian, called

Maximus, wrote to him in a tone of loving reproach: "Thou hast drawn away

from us"--\_a secta nostra deviasti\_. Did he wish to hint that at this time

Augustin had glided into paganism? Nothing is more unlikely. He himself

assures us that the name of Christ remained always "graven on his heart."

But while he was at Madaura he lived indifferently with pagans and

Christians.

Besides that, the teaching he got was altogether pagan in tone. No doubt he

picked out, as he always did, the subjects which suited him. Minds such as

his fling themselves upon that which is likely to nourish them: they throw

aside all the rest, or suffer it very unwillingly. Thus Augustin never

wavered in his dislike for Greek: he was a poor Greek scholar. He detested

the Greeks by instinct. According to Western prejudice, these men of

the East were all rascals or amusers. Augustin, as a practical African,

always regarded the Greeks as vain, discoursing wits. In a word, they

were not sincere people whom it would be safe to trust. The entirely

local patriotism of the classical Greek authors further annoyed this Roman

citizen who was used to regard the world as his country: he thought them

very narrow-minded to take so much interest in the history of some little

town. As for him, he looked higher and farther. It must be remembered that

in the second half of the fourth century the Greek attitude, broadened and

fully conscious of itself, set itself more and more against Latinism, above

all, politically. There it lay, a hostile and impenetrable block before the

Western peoples. And here was a stronger reason for a Romanized African to

dislike the Greeks.

So he painfully construed the \_Iliad\_ and \_Odyssey\_, very cross at the

difficulties of a foreign language which prevented him from grasping the

plots of the fine, fabulous narratives. There were, however, abridgments

used in the schools, a kind of summaries of the Trojan War, written by

Latin grammarians under the odd pseudonyms of Dares the Phrygian and Dictys

of Crete. But these abridgments were very dry for an imagination like

Augustin's. He much preferred the \_Æneid\_, the poem admired above all

by the Africans, on account of the episode devoted to the foundation of

Carthage. Virgil was his passion. He read and re-read him continually;

he knew him by heart. To the end of his life, in his severest writings,

he quoted verses or whole passages out of his much-loved poet. Dido's

adventure moved him to tears. They had to pluck the book out of his hands.

Now the reason is that there was a secret harmony between Virgil's soul and

the soul of Augustin. Both were gracious and serious. One, the great poet,

and one, the humble schoolboy, they both had pity on the Queen of Carthage,

they would have liked to save her, or at any rate to mitigate her sadness,

to alter a little the callousness of Æneas and the harshness of the Fates.

But think of it! Love is a divine sickness, a chastisement sent by the

gods. It is just, when all's said, that the guilty one should endure her

agony to the very end. And then, such very great things are going to arise

out of this poor love! Upon it depends the lot of two Empires. What counts

a woman before Rome and Carthage? Besides, she was bound to perish: the

gods had decreed it.... There was in all that a concentrated emotion, a

depth of sentiment, a religious appeal which stirred Augustin's heart,

still unaware of itself. This obedience of the Virgilian hero to the

heavenly will, was already an adumbration of the humility of the future

Christian.

Certainly, Augustin did not perceive very plainly in these turbid years

of his youth the full religious significance of Virgil's poem. Carried

away by his headstrong nature, he yielded to the heart-rending charm of

the romantic story: he lived it, literally, with the heroine. When his

schoolmasters desired him to elaborate the lament of the dying Queen Dido

in Latin prose, what he wrote had a veritable quiver of anguish. Without

the least defence against lust and the delusions of the heart, he spent

intellectually and in a single outburst all the strength of passion.

He absorbed every love-poem with the eagerness of a participating soul. If

he took pleasure in the licentiousness of Plautus and Terence, if he read

delightfully those comedies wherein the worst weaknesses are excused and

glorified, I believe that he took still more pleasure in the Latin Elegiacs

who present without any shame the romantic madness of Alexandrine love.

For what sing these poets even to weariness, unless it be that no one can

resist the Cyprian goddess, that life has no other end but love? Love for

itself, to love for the sake of loving--there is the constant subject of

these sensualists, of Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid. After the story

of Dido, the youthful reader was ravished by the story of Ariadne, even

more disturbing, because no remorse modifies the frenzy of it. He read:

\_Now while the careless hero flees, beating the wave with his

and casting to the gales of the open sea his idle promises,--there,

standing among the shingle of the beach, the daughter of Minos follows

him, alas! with her beautiful sad eyes: she stares, astonied, like to a

Bacchante changed into a statue. She looks forth, and her heart floats

upon the great waves of her grief. She lets slip from her head her

fine-spun coif, she tears away the thin veils which cover her bosom,

and the smooth cincture which supports her quivering breasts. All that

slips from her body into the salt foam which ripples round her feet.

But little she cares for her coif or for her apparel carried away by

the tide! Lost, bewildered, with all her heart and all her soul, she is

clinging to thee, O Theseus.\_

And if Augustin, when he had read these burning verses of Catullus, looked

through the Anthologies which were popular in the African schools, he

would come upon "The Vigil of Venus," that eclogue which ends with such a

passionate cry:

\_O my springtime, when wilt thou come? When shall I be as the swallow?

When shall I cease to be silent?... May he love to-morrow, he

has not loved yet. And he who has already loved, may he love again

to-morrow.\_

Imagine the effect of such exhortations on a youth of fifteen! Truly, this

springtide of love, which the poet cries for in his distress, the son

of Monnica knew well was come for him. How he must have listened to the

musical and melancholy counsellor who told his pain to the leaves of the

book! What stimulant and what food for his boyish longings and dreams! And

what a divine chorus of beauties the great love-heroines of ancient epic

and elegy, Helen, Medea, Ariadne, Phædra, formed and re-formed continually

in his dazzled memory! When we of to-day read such verses at Augustin's

age, some bitterness is mixed with our delight. These heroes and heroines

are too far from us. These almost chimerical beings withdraw from us into

outlying lands, to a vanished world which will never come again. But for

Augustin, this was the world he was born into--it was his pagan Africa

where pleasure was the whole of life, and one lived only for the lusts of

the flesh. And the race of fabulous princesses--they were not dead, those

ladies: they were ever waiting for the well-beloved in the palaces at

Carthage. Yes, the scholar of Madaura lived wonderful hours, dreaming thus

of love between the pages of the poets. These young dreams before love

comes are more bewitching than love itself: a whole unknown world suddenly

discovered and entered with a quivering joy of discovery at each step. The

unused strength of illusion appears inexhaustible, space becomes deeper and

the heart more strong....

A long time afterwards, when, recovered from all that, Augustin speaks to

us of the Divine love, he will know fully the infinite value of it from

having gone through all the painful entrancements of the other. And he will

say to us, with the sureness of experience: "The pleasure of the human

heart in the light of truth and the abundance of wisdom--yea, the pleasure

of the human heart, of the faithful heart, and of the heart which is

holy, stands alone. You will find nothing in any voluptuousness fit to be

compared to it. I say not that this other pleasure is less, for that which

is called less hath only to increase to become equal. No, I shall not say

that all other pleasure is less. No comparison can be made. It is another

kind, it is another reality."

VI

THE HOLIDAYS AT THAGASTE

In the city of Apuleius, the Christian Monnica's son became simply a pagan.

He was near his sixteenth year: the awkward time of early virility was

beginning for him. Prepared at Madaura, it suddenly burst out at Thagaste.

Augustin came back to his parents, no doubt during the vacation. But

this vacation lasted perhaps a whole year. He had come to the end of his

juvenile studies. The grammarians at Madaura could teach him nothing more.

To round off his acquirements, it would be necessary to attend the lectures

of some well-known rhetorician. Now there were very good rhetoricians only

at Carthage. Besides, it was a fashion, and point of honour, for Numidian

families to send their sons to finish their education in the provincial

capital. Patricius was most eager to do this for his son, who at Madaura

had shewn himself a very brilliant pupil and ought not therefore to be

pulled up half-way down the course. But the life of a student cost a good

deal, and Patricius had no money. His affairs were always muddled. He was

obliged to wait for the rents from his farms, to grind down his tenants,

and, ultimately, despairing of any other way out of it, to ask for an

advance of money from a rich patron. That needed time and diplomacy.

Days and months went by, and Augustin, with nothing to do, joined in with

easily-made friends and gave himself up to the pleasures of his time of

life, like all the young townsmen of Thagaste--pleasures rather rough and

little various, such as were to be got in a little free-town of those days,

and as they have remained for the natives of to-day, whether they live

a town or country life. To hunt, to ride horseback, to play at games of

chance, to drink, eat, and make love--they wanted nothing beyond that. When

Augustin in his \_Confessions\_ accuses himself of his youthful escapades he

uses the most scathing language. He speaks of them with horror and disgust.

Once more we are tempted to believe that he exaggerates through an excess

of Christian remorse. There are even some who, put on their guard by this

vehement tone, have questioned the historical value of the \_Confessions\_.

They argue that when the Bishop of Hippo wrote these things his views and

feelings had altered. He could no longer judge with the same eye and in

the same spirit the happenings of his youth. All this is only too certain:

when he wrote, it was as a Christian he judged himself, and not as a cold

historian who refuses to go beyond the brutal fact. He tried to unravel

the origin and to trace the consequences of the humblest of his actions,

because this is of the highest importance for salvation. But however severe

his judgment may be, it does not impair the reality of the fact itself.

Moreover, in natures like his, acts which others would hardly think of

have a vibration out of all proportion with the act itself. The evil of sin

depends upon the consciousness of the sin and the pleasure taken in it.

Augustin was very intelligent and very sensual.

In any case, young Africans develop early, and the lechery of the race

is proverbial. It must have been a good deal stronger at a time when

Christianity still had to fight against pagan slackness in these matters,

ere Islam had imposed its hypocritical austerity upon the general conduct.

There is even room for wonder that in Augustin's case this crisis of

development did not happen earlier than his sixteenth year. It seems that

it was only more violent. In what language he describes it! "I dared to

roam the woods and pursue my vagrant loves beneath the shade." But he

was not yet in love--this he points out himself. In his case then it was

simple lust. "From the quagmire of concupiscence, from the well of puberty,

exhaled a mist which clouded and befogged my heart, so that I could not

distinguish between the clear shining of affection and the darkness of

lust.... I could not keep within the kingdom of light, where friendship

binds soul to soul.... And so I polluted the brook of friendship with the

sewage of lust." Let us not try to make it clearer than he has left it

himself. When one thinks of all the African vices, one dare not dwell upon

such avowals. "Lord," he says, "I was loathsome in Thy sight." And with

pitiless justice he analyses the effect of the evil: "It stormed confusedly

within me, whirling my thoughtless youth over the precipices of desire. And

I wandered still further from Thee, and Thou didst leave me to myself; the

torrent of my fornications tossed and swelled and boiled and ran over." And

during this time: "Thou saidst nothing, O my God!" This silence of God is

the terrible sign of hardened sin, of hopeless damnation. It meant utter

depravity of the will; he did not even feel remorse any more.

Here he is, then, as if unfastened from his child's soul--separated from

himself. The object of his youthful faith has no more meaning for him. He

understands no longer, and it is all one to him that he does not. Thus,

told by himself, does this first crisis of Augustin's life emerge from the

autobiography; and it takes on a general significance. Once for all, under

a definite form, and to a certain degree classic, he has diagnosed with

his subtle experience of doctor of souls the pubescent crisis in all young

men of his age, in all the young Christians who are to come after him. For

the story of Augustin is the story of each of us. The loss of faith always

occurs when the senses first awaken. At this critical moment, when nature

claims us for her service, the consciousness of spiritual things is, in

most cases, either eclipsed or totally destroyed. The gradual usage to the

brutalities of the instinct ends by killing the sensitiveness of the inward

feelings. It is not reason which turns the young man from God; it is the

flesh. Scepticism but provides him with excuses for the new life he is

leading.

Thus started, Augustin was not able to pull up half-way on the road of

pleasure; he never did anything by halves. In these vulgar revels of the

ordinary wild youth, he wanted again to be best, he wanted to be first as

he was at school. He stirred up his companions and drew them after him.

They in their turn drew him. Among them was found that Alypius, who was the

friend of all his life, who shared his faults and mistakes, who followed

him even in his conversion, and became Bishop of Thagaste. These two future

shepherds of Christ roamed the streets with the lost sheep. They spent

the nights in the open spaces of the town, playing, or wantonly dreaming

before cups of cool drinks. They lounged there, stretched out on mats, with

a crown of leaves on the head, a jasmine garland round the neck, a rose

or marigold thrust above the ear. They never knew what to do next to kill

time. So one fine evening the reckless crew took it into their heads to

rifle a pear tree of one of Patricius's neighbours. This pear tree was just

beyond the vineyard belonging to Augustin's father. The rascals shook down

the pears. They took a few bites to find out the taste, and having decided

this to be rather disappointing, they chucked all the rest to the hogs.

In this theft, done merely for the pleasure of the thing, Augustin sees

an evidence of diabolical mischief. Doubtless he committed many another

misdeed where, like this, the whole attraction lay in the Satanic joy

of breaking the law. His fury for dissolute courses knew no rest. Did

Monnica observe anything of this change in Augustin? The boy, grown big,

had escaped from the supervision of the women's apartments. If the mother

guessed anything, she did not guess all. It fell to her husband to open her

eyes. With the freedom of manners among the ancients, Augustin relates the

fact quite plainly.... That took place in the bath-buildings at Thagaste.

He was bathing with his father, probably in the \_piscina\_ of cold baths.

The bathers who came out of the water with dripping limbs were printing

wet marks of their feet upon the mosaic flooring, when Patricius, who was

watching them, suddenly perceived that his son had about him the signs

of manhood, that he was already bearing--as Augustin says himself in his

picturesque language--the first signs of turbulent youth, like another

\_toga praetexta\_. Patricius, as a good pagan, welcomed with jubilation this

promise of grand-children, and rushed off joyously to brag of his discovery

to Monnica. She took the news in quite another way. Frightened at the idea

of the dangers to which her son's virtue was exposed, she lectured him

in private. But Augustin, from the height of his sixteen years, laughed

at her. "A lot of old-women's gossip! Why does she want to talk about

things she can't understand!..." Tired out at last, Monnica tried to get

a promise from her son that he would at least have some restraint in his

dissipation--that he would avoid women of the town, and above all, that he

would have nothing to do with married women. For the rest, she put him in

God's hands.

It may be wondered--Augustin himself wonders--that she did not think of

finding him a wife. They marry early in Africa. Even now any Arab labourer

buys a wife for his son, hardly turned sixteen, so that the fires of a too

warm youth may be quenched in marriage. But Monnica, who was not yet a

saint, acted in this matter like a foreseeing and practical woman of the

prosperous class. A wife would be a drag for a young man like Augustin, who

seemed likely to have such a brilliant career. A too early marriage would

jeopardize his future. Before all things, it was important that he should

become an illustrious rhetorician, and raise the fortunes of the family.

For her, all else yielded to this consideration. But she hoped at least

that the headstrong student might consent to be good into the bargain.

This was also Patricius's way of looking at the matter. And so, says

Augustin, "My father gave himself no concern how I grew towards Thee, or

how chaste I was, provided only that I became a man of culture--however

destitute of Thy culture, O God.... My mother and he slackened the curb

without regard to due severity, and I was suffered to enjoy myself

according to my dissolute fancy." Meanwhile, Patricius was now become

(very tardily) a catechumen. The entreaties of his wife had won him to the

Catholic faith. But his sentiments were not much more Christian--"He hardly

thought of Thee, my God," acknowledges his son, who nevertheless was

pleased at this conversion. If Patricius decided to get converted, it was

probably from political reasons. Since the death of Julian the Apostate,

paganism appeared finally conquered. The Emperor Valentinianus had just

proclaimed heavy penalties against night-sacrifices. In Africa, the

Count Romanus persecuted the Donatists. All the Christians in Thagaste

were Catholic. What was the good of keeping up a useless and dangerous

resistance? Perhaps the end of Patricius--which was near--was as edifying

as Monnica could wish. But at all events, at the present moment, he was

not the man to interfere with Augustin's pleasures: he only thought of

the eventual fortune of the young man. Alone, Monnica might have had some

influence on him, and she herself was fascinated by his future career in

the world. Perhaps, to quiet her conscience, she said to herself that this

frivolous education would be more or less of a help to her son towards

bringing him back to God, that a day would come when the famous rhetorician

would plead the cause of Christ?...

Scandalized though she might be at his conduct, it is however apparent that

it was about this time she began to get fonder of him, to worry over him as

her favourite child. But it was not till much later that the union between

mother and son became quite complete. Too many old customs still remained

preventing close intercourse between the men and women of a family. And it

will hardly do to picture such intimacy from the intimacy which may exist

between a mother and son of our own time. There was none of the spoiling,

or indulgence, or culpable weakness which enervates maternal tenderness and

makes it injurious to the energy of a manly character. Monnica was severe

and a little rough. If she let her feelings be seen, it was solely before

God. And yet it is most certain that in the depth of her heart she loved

Augustin, not only as a future member of Christ, but humanly, as a woman

frustrated of love in a badly assorted marriage may spend her love on her

child. The brutality of pagan ways revolted her, and she poured on this

young head all her stored-up affection. In Augustin she loved the being she

wished she could love in her husband.

A number of personal considerations were no doubt involved in the deep and

unselfish attachment she had for her son: instinctively, she looked for him

to protect her against the father's violence. She felt that he would be the

support of her old age, and also, she foresaw dimly what one day he would

be. All this aided to bring about the tie, the understanding, which grew

more and more close between Augustin and Monnica. And so from this time

they both appear to us as they were to appear to all posterity--the pattern

of the Christian Mother and Son. Thanks to them, the hard law of the

ancients has been abrogated. There shall be no more barriers between the

mother and her child. No longer shall it be vain exterior rites which draw

together the members of the same family: they shall communicate in spirit

and truth. Heart speaketh to heart. The fellowship of souls is founded,

and the ties of the domestic hearth are drawn close, as they never were in

antiquity. No more shall they work in concert only for material things;

they will join together to love--and to love each other more. The son will

belong more to his mother.

At the time we have now come to, Monnica was already undertaking the

conquest of Augustin's soul. She prayed for him fervently. The young man

cared very little: gratitude came to him only after his conversion. At this

time he was thinking of nothing but amusement. For this he even forgot his

career. But Monnica and Patricius thought of it constantly--especially

Patricius, who gave himself enormous trouble to enable this student on a

holiday to finish his studies. Eventually he got together the necessary

money, possibly borrowed enough to make up the sum from some rich landowner

who was the patron of the people of small means in Thagaste--say, that

gorgeous Romanianus, to whom Augustin, in acknowledgment, dedicated one of

his first books. The young man could now take the road for Carthage.

He left by himself, craving for knowledge and glory and pleasure, his heart

full of longing for what he knew not, and melancholy without cause. What

was going to become of him in the great, unknown city?

THE SECOND PART

THE ENCHANTMENT OF CARTHAGE

Amare et amari.

"To love and to be loved."

\_Confessions\_, III, i.

I

CARTHAGO VENERIS

"I went to Carthage, where shameful loves bubbled round me like boiling

oil."

This cry of repentance, uttered by the converted Augustin twenty-five

years later, does not altogether stifle his words of admiration for the

old capital of his country. One can see this patriotic admiration stirring

between the lines. Carthage made a very strong impression on him. He gave

it his heart and remained faithful to the end. His enemies, the Donatists,

called him "the Carthaginian arguer." After he became Bishop of Hippo, he

was continually going to Carthage to preach, or dispute, or consult his

colleagues, or to ask something from men in office. When he is not there,

he is ever speaking of it in his treatises and plain sermons. He takes

comparisons from it: "You who have been to Carthage--" he often says to

his listeners. For the boy from little Thagaste to go to Carthage, was

about the same as for our youths from the provinces to go to Paris. \_Veni

Carthaginem\_--in these simple words there is a touch of naive emphasis

which reveals the bewilderment of the Numidian student just landed in the

great city.

And, in fact, it was one of the five great capitals of the Empire: there

were Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria--Carthage. Carthage was the

sea-port capital of the whole western Mediterranean. With its large new

streets, its villas, its temples, its palaces, its docks, its variously

dressed cosmopolitan population, it astonished and delighted the schoolboy

from Madaura. Whatever local marks were left about him, or signs of the

rustic simpleton, it brushed off. At first, Augustin must have felt himself

as good as lost there.

There he was, his own master, with nobody to counsel and direct him. He

does indeed mention his fellow-countryman, that Romanianus, the patron of

his father and of other people in Thagaste, as a high and generous friend

who invited him to his house when he, a poor youth, came to finish his

studies in a strange city, and helped him, not only with his purse, but

with his friendship. Unfortunately the allusion is not very clear. Still,

it does seem to shew that Augustin, in the first days after his arrival at

Carthage, stayed with Romanianus. It is not in the least improbable that

Romanianus had a house at Carthage and spent the winter there: during the

rest of the year he would be in his country houses round about Thagaste.

This opulent benefactor might not have been satisfied with giving Augustin

a good "tip" for his journey when he was leaving his native town, but may

also have put him up in his own house at Carthage. Such was the atonement

for those enormous fortunes of antiquity: the rich had to give freely and

constantly. With the parcelling out of wealth we have become much more

egoistical.

In any case, Romanianus, taken up with his pleasures and business, could

not have been much of a guide for Monnica's son. Augustin was therefore

without control, or very nearly. No doubt he came to Carthage with a strong

desire to increase his knowledge and get renown, but still more athirst

for love and the emotions of sentiment. The love-prelude was deliriously

prolonged for him. He was at that time so overwhelmed by it, that it is the

first thing he thinks of when he relates his years at Carthage. "To love

and be loved" seems to him, as to his dear Alexandrine poets, the single

object of life. Yet he was not in love, "but he loved the idea of love."

\_Nondum amabam, et amare amabam ... amare amans....\_

Truly, never a pagan poet had hitherto found such language to speak

of love. These subtle phrases are not only the work of a marvellous

word-smith: through their almost imperceptible shades of meaning may be

descried an entirely new soul, the pleasure-loving soul of the old world

awakening to spiritual life. Modern people have repeated the words more

than enough, but by translating them too literally--"I loved to love"--they

have perhaps distorted the sense. They have made Augustin a kind of

Romantic like Alfred de Musset, a dilettante in love. Augustin is not so

modern, although he often seems one of ourselves. When he wrote those words

he was a bishop and a penitent. What strikes him above all in looking back

upon his uneasy and feverish life as a youth and young man, is the great

onrush of all his being which swept him towards love. Plainly, man is made

for love, since he loves without object and without cause, since in itself

alone the idea of love is already for him a beginning of love. Only he

falls into error in giving to creatures a heart that the Creator alone can

fill and satisfy. In this love for love's sake, Augustin discerned the sign

of the predestined soul whose tenderness will find no rest but in God. That

is why he repeats this word "Love" with a kind of intoxication. He knows

that those who love like him cannot love long with a human love. Nor does

he blush to acknowledge it:--he loved--he loved with all his soul--he

loved to the point of loving the coming of love. Happy intimation for the

Christian! A heart so afire is pledged to the eternal marriage.

With this heat of passion, this lively sensibility, Augustin was a prey for

Carthage. The voluptuous city took complete hold on him by its charm and

its beauty, by all the seductions of mind and sense, by its promises of

easy enjoyment.

First of all, it softened this young provincial, used to the harder country

life of his home; it relaxed the Numidian contracted by the roughness of

his climate; it cooled his eyes burned by the sun in the full-flowing of

its waters and the suavity of its horizons. It was a city of laziness, and

above all, of pleasure, as well for those plunged in business as for the

idlers. They called it \_Carthago Veneris\_--Carthage of Venus. And certainly

the old Phoenician Tanit always reigned there. Since the rebuilding of her

temple by the Romans, she had transformed herself into \_Virgo Coelestis\_.

This Virgin of Heaven was the great Our Lady of unchastity, towards whom

still mounted the adoration of the African land four hundred years after

the birth of Christ. "Strange Virgin," Augustin was to say later, "who can

only be honoured by the loss of virginity." Her dissolving influence seemed

to overcome the whole region. There is no more feminine country than this

Carthaginian peninsula, ravished on all sides by the caress of the waters.

Stretched out between her lakes on the edge of the sea, Carthage lounged in

the humid warmth of her mists, as if in the suffocating atmosphere of her

vapour-baths.

She stole away the energies, but she was an enchantment for the eyes.

From the top of the impressive flight of steps which led up to the temple

of Æsculapius on the summit of the Acropolis, Augustin could see at his

feet the huge, even-planned city, with its citadel walls which spread out

indefinitely, its gardens, blue waters, flaxen plains, and the mountains.

Did he pause on the steps at sunset, the two harbours, rounded cup-shape,

shone, rimmed by the quays, like lenses of ruby. To the left, the Lake of

Tunis, stirless, without a ripple, as rich in ethereal lights as a Venetian

lagoon, radiated in ever-altering sheens, delicate and splendid. In front,

across the bay, dotted with the sails of ships close-hauled to the wind,

beyond the wind-swept and shimmering intervals, the mountains of Rhodes

raised their aerial summit-lines against the sky. What an outlook on the

world for a young man dreaming of fame! And what more exhilarating spot

than this Mount Byrsa, where, in deep layers, so many heroic memories were

gathered and superimposed. The great dusty plains which bury themselves

far off in the sands of the desert, the mountains--yes, and isles and

headlands, all bowed before the Hill that Virgil sang and seemed to do

her reverence. She held in awe the innumerable tribes of the barbaric

continent; she was mistress of the sea. Rome herself, from the height of

her Palatine, surged less imperial.

More than any other of the young men seated with him on the benches of the

school of rhetoric, Augustin hearkened to the dumb appeals which came

from the ancient ruins and new palaces of Carthage. But the supple and

treacherous city knew the secret of enchaining the will. She tempted him by

the open display of her amusements. Under this sun which touches to beauty

the plaster of a hut, the grossest pleasures have an attraction which men

of the North cannot understand. The overflowing of lust surrounds you.

This prolific swarming, all these bodies, close-pressed and soft with

sweat, give forth as it were a breath of fornication which melts the will.

Augustin breathed in with delight the heavy burning air, loaded with human

odours, which filled the streets and squares of Carthage. To all the bold

soliciting, to all the hands stretched out to detain him as he walked, he

yielded.

But for a mind like his Carthage had more subtle allurements in reserve.

He was taken by her theatres, by the verses of her poets and the melodies

of her musicians. He shed tears at the plays of Menander and Terence;

he lamented upon the misfortunes of separated lovers; he shared their

quarrels, rejoiced and despaired with them. And still he awaited the

epiphany of Love--that Love which the performance of the actors shewed him

to be so touching and fine.

Such then was Augustin, given over to the irresponsibility of his eighteen

years--a heart spoiled by romantic literature, a mind impatient to try

every sort of intellectual adventure in the most corrupting and bewitching

city known to the pagan centuries, set amidst one of the most entrancing

landscapes in the world.

II

THE AFRICAN ROME

Carthage did not offer only pleasures to Augustin; it was besides an

extraordinary subject to think about for an understanding so alert and

all-embracing as his.

At Carthage he understood the Roman grandeur as he could not at Madaura

and the Numidian towns. Here, as elsewhere, the Romans made a point of

impressing the minds of conquered races by the display of their strength

and magnificence. Above all, they aimed at the immense. The towns built

by them offered the same decorative and monumental character of the

Greek cities of the Hellenistic period, which the Romans had further

exaggerated--a character not without emphasis and over-elaboration, but

which was bound to astonish, and that was the main thing in their view. In

short, their ideal was not perceptibly different from that of our modern

town councillors. To lay out streets which intersected at right angles; to

create towns cut into even blocks like chessboards; to multiply prospects

and huge architectural masses--all the Roman cities of this period revealed

such an aim, with an almost identical plan.

Erected after this type, the new Carthage caused the old to be forgotten.

Everybody agreed that it was second only to Rome. The African writers

squandered the most hyperbolical praises upon it. For them it is "The

splendid, the august, the sublime Carthage." Although there may well be a

certain amount of triviality or of patriotic exaggeration in these praises,

it is certain that the Roman capital of the Province of Africa was no less

considerable than the old metropolis of the Hanno and Barcine factions.

With a population almost as large as that of Rome, it had almost as great

a circumference. It must further be recalled that as it had no ramparts

till the Vandal invasion, the city overflowed into the country. With its

gardens, villas, and burial-places of the dead, it covered nearly the

entire peninsula, to-day depopulated.

Carthage, as well as Rome, had her Capitol and Palatine upon Mount Byrsa,

where rose no doubt a temple consecrated to the Capitolean triune deities,

Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, not far from the great temple of Æsculapius, a

modern transformation of the old Punic Eschmoum. Hard by these sanctuaries,

the Proconsul's palace dominated Carthage from the height of the acclivity

of the Acropolis. The Forum was at the foot of the hill, probably in the

neighbourhood of the ports--a Forum built and arranged in the Roman way,

with its shops of bankers and money-changers placed under the circular

galleries, with the traditional image of Marsyas, and a number of statues

of local celebrities. Apuleius no doubt had his there. Further off was the

Harbour Square, where gathered foreigners recently landed and the idlers of

the city in search of news, and where the booksellers offered the new books

and pamphlets. There was to be seen one of the curiosities of Carthage--a

mosaic representing fabulous monsters, men without heads, and men with only

one leg and one foot--a huge foot under which, lying upon their backs, they

sheltered from the sun, as under a parasol. On account of this feature they

were called the \_sciapodes\_. Augustin, who like everybody else had paused

before these grotesque figures, recalls them somewhere to his readers....

Beside the sea, in the lower town and upon the two near hills of the

Acropolis, were a number of detached buildings that the old authors have

preserved the names of and briefly described. Thanks to the zeal of

archæologists, it is now become impossible to tell where they stood.

The pagan sanctuaries were numerous. That of the goddess Coelestis, the

great patroness of Carthage, occupied a space of five thousand feet. It

comprised, besides the actual [Greek: hieron], where stood the image of the

goddess, gardens, sacred groves, and courts surrounded with columns. The

ancient Phoenician Moloch had also his temple under the name of Saturn.

They called him \_The Old One\_, so Augustin tells us, and his worshippers

were falling away. On the other hand, Carthage had another sanctuary which

was very fashionable, a \_Serapeum\_ as at Alexandria, where were manifested

the pomps of the Egyptian ritual, celebrated by Apuleius. Neighbouring

the holy places, came the places of amusement: the theatre, the Odeum,

circus, stadium, and amphitheatre--this last, of equal dimensions with

the Colosseum at Rome, its gallery rising upon gallery, and its realistic

sculptures of animals and artisans. Then there were the buildings for the

public service: the immense cisterns of the East and the Malga, the great

aqueduct, which, after being carried along a distance of fifty-five miles,

emptied the water of the Zaghouan into the reservoirs at Carthage. Finally,

there were the Baths, some of which we know--those of Antoninus and of

Maximianus, and those of Gargilius, where one of the most important

Councils known to the history of the African Church assembled. There were

likewise many Christian basilicas at the time of Augustin. The authors

mention seventeen: it is likely there were more. That of Damous-el-Karita,

the only one of which considerable traces have been found, was vast and

richly decorated, and was perhaps the cathedral of Carthage.

What other buildings there were are utterly lost to history. It

may be conjectured, however, that Carthage, as well as Rome, had a

\_septizonium\_--a decorative building with peristyles one above the other

which surrounded a reservoir. In fact, it is claimed that the one at

Rome was copied from Carthage. Straight streets paved with large flags

intersected around these buildings, forming a network of long avenues, very

bright and ventilated. Some of them were celebrated in the ancient world

either for their beauty or the animation of their trade: the street of the

Jewellers, the street of Health, of Saturn, of Coelestis, too, or of Juno.

The fig and vegetable markets and the public granaries were also some of

the main centres of Carthaginian life.

It is unquestionable that Carthage, with its buildings and statues, its

squares, avenues and public gardens, looked like a large capital, and was

a perfect example of that ideal of rather brutal magnificence and strength

which the Romans obtruded everywhere.

And even while it dazzled the young provincial from Thagaste, the African

Rome shewed him the virtue of order--social and political order. Carthage,

the metropolis of Western Africa, maintained an army of officials who

handled the government in its smallest details. First of all, there

were the representatives of the central power, the imperial rulers--the

Proconsul, a sort of vice-emperor, who was surrounded by a full court, a

civil and military staff, a privy council, an \_officium\_ which included a

crowd of dignitaries and subaltern clerks. Then there was the Proprætor

of Africa who, being in control of the government of the whole African

province, had an \_officium\_ still larger perhaps than the Proconsul's.

After them came the city magistrates, who were aided in their functions by

the Council of the Decurions--the Senate of Carthage. These Carthaginian

senators cut a considerable figure: for them their colleagues at Rome

were full of airs and graces, and the Emperors endeavoured to keep them

in a good-humour. All the details of city government came under their

supervision: the slaughter-houses, buildings, the gathering of municipal

taxes, and the police, which comprised even the guardians of the Forum.

Then there were the army and navy. The home port of a grain-carrying fleet

which conveyed the African cereals to Ostia, Carthage could starve Rome

if she liked. The grain and oil of all countries lay in her docks--the

storehouses of the state provisions, which were in charge of a special

prefect who had under his orders a whole corporation of overseers and

clerks.

Augustin must have heard a good deal of grumbling at Carthage against this

excess of officialism. But, all the same, so well-governed a city was a

very good school for a young man who was to combine later the duties of

bishop, judge, and governor. The blessings of order, of what was called

"the Roman peace" no doubt impressed him the more, as he himself came from

a turbulent district often turned upside down by the quarrels of religious

sects and by the depredations of the nomads--a boundary-land of the Sahara

regions where it was much harder to bring the central government into

play than in Carthage and the coast-towns. To appreciate the beauty of

government, there is nothing like living in a country where all is at the

mercy of force or the first-comer's will. Such of the Barbarians who came

in contact with Roman civilization were overcome with admiration for the

good order that it established. But what astonished them more than anything

else was that the Empire was everywhere.

No man, whatever his race or country, could help feeling proud to belong to

the Roman city. He was at home in all the countries in the world subject

to Rome. Our Europe, split into nationalities, can hardly understand now

this feeling of pride, so different from our narrow patriotisms. The way to

feel something of it is to go to the colonies: out there the least of us

may believe himself a sovereign, simply from the fact that he is a subject

of the governing country. This feeling was very strong in the old world.

Carthage, where the striking effect of the Empire appeared in all its

brilliancy, would increase it in Augustin. He had only to look around him

to value the extent of the privilege conferred by Rome on her citizens. Men

coming from all countries, without exception of race, were, so to speak,

made partners of the Empire and collaborated in the grandeur of the Roman

scheme. If the Proconsul who then occupied the Byrsa palace, the celebrated

Symmachus, belonged to an old Italian family, he whom he represented,

the Emperor Valentinian, was the son of a Pannonian soldier. The Count

Theodosius, the general who suppressed the insurrection of Firmus in

Mauretania, was a Spaniard, and the army he led into Africa was made up,

for the most part, of Gauls. Later on, under Arcadius, another Gaul,

Rufinus, shall be master of the whole of the East.

An active mind like Augustin's could not remain indifferent before this

spectacle of the world thrown open by Rome to all men of talent. He had the

soul of a poet, quick to enthusiasm; the sight of the Eagles planted on

the Acropolis at Carthage moved him in a way he never forgot. He acquired

the habit of seeing big, and began to cast off race prejudices and all the

petty narrowness of a local spirit. When he became a Christian he did not

close himself up, like the Donatists, within the African Church. His dream

was that Christ's Empire upon earth should equal the Empire of the Cæsars.

Still, it is desirable not to fall into error upon this Roman unity.

Behind the imposing front it shewed from one end to the other of the

Mediterranean, the variety of peoples, with their manners, traditions,

special religions, was always there, and in Africa more than elsewhere.

The population of Carthage was astonishingly mixed. The hybrid character

of this country without unity was illustrated by the streaks found in the

Carthaginian crowds. All the specimens of African races elbowed one another

in the streets, from the nigger, brought from his native Soudan by the

slave-merchant, to the Romanized Numidian. The inflow, continually renewed,

of traffickers and cosmopolitan adventurers increased this confusion.

And so Carthage was a Babel of races, of costumes, of beliefs and ideas.

Augustin, who was at heart a mystic, but also a dialectician extremely fond

of showy discussions, found in Carthage a lively summary of the religions

and philosophies of his day. During these years of study and reflection he

captured booty of knowledge and observation which he would know how to make

use of in the future.

In the Carthage sanctuaries and schools, in the squares and the streets,

he could see pass the disciples of all the systems, the props of all the

superstitions, the devotees of all the religions. He heard the shrill

clamour of disputes, the tumult of fights and riots. When a man was at the

end of his arguments, he knocked down his opponent. The authorities had a

good deal of trouble to keep order. Augustin, who was an intrepid logician,

must have longed to take his share in these rows. But one cannot exactly

improvise a faith between to-day and to-morrow. While he awaited the

enlightenment of the truth, he studied the Carthaginian Babel.

First of all, there was the official religion, the most obvious and perhaps

the most brilliant, that of the Divinity of the Emperors, which was still

kept up even under the Christian Cæsars. Each year, at the end of October,

the elected delegates of the entire province, having at their head the

\_Sacerdos province\_, the provincial priest, arrived at Carthage. Their

leader, clad in a robe broidered with palms, gold crown on head, made his

solemn entry into the city. It was a perfect invasion, each member dragging

in his wake a mob of clients and servants. The Africans, with their

taste for pomp and colour, seized the chance to give themselves over to a

display of ruinous sumptuosities: rich dresses, expensive horses splendidly

caparisoned, processions, sacrifices, public banquets, games at the circus

and amphitheatre. These strangers so overcrowded the city that the imperial

Government had to forbid them, under severe penalties, to stay longer

than five days. A very prudent measure! At these times, collisions were

inevitable between pagans and Christians. It was desirable to scatter such

crowds as soon as possible, for riots were always smouldering in their

midst.

No less thronged were the festivals of the Virgin of Heaven. A survival

of the national religion, these feasts were dear to the hearts of the

Carthaginians. Augustin went to them with his fellow-students. "We trooped

there from every quarter," he says. There was a great gathering of people

in the interior court which led up to the temple. The statue, taken from

its sanctuary, was placed before the peristyle upon a kind of repository.

Wantons, arrayed with barbarous lavishness, danced around the holy

image; actors performed and sang hymns. "Our eager eyes," Augustin adds

maliciously, "rested in turn on the goddess, and on the girls, her

adorers." The Great Mother of the Gods, the Goddess of Mount Berecyntus,

was worshipped with similar license. Every year the people of Carthage went

to wash her solemnly in the sea. Her statue, carried in a splendid litter,

robed with precious stuffs, curled and farded, passed through the streets

of the city, with its guard of mummers and Corybants. These last, "with

hair greasy from pomade, pale faces, and a loose and effeminate walk, held

out bowls for alms to the onlookers."

The devotion to Isis was yet another excuse for processions: the \_Serapeum\_

was a rival attraction to the temple of the Heavenly Maiden. If we may

trust Tertullian, the Africans swore only by Serapis. Possibly Mithras

had also worshippers in Carthage. Anyhow, the occult religions were fully

represented there. Miracle-working was becoming more and more the basis

even of paganism. Never had the soothsayers been more flourishing.

Everybody, in secret, pried into the entrails of the sacrificial victims,

or used magic spells. As to the wizards and astrologists, they did business

openly. Augustin himself consulted them, like all the Carthaginians. The

public credulity had no limits.

On the opposite side from the pagan worship, the sects which had sprung

from Christianity sprouted. True, Africa has given birth to but a small

number of heresies: the Africans had not the subtle mind of the Orientals

and they were not given to theorizing. But a good many of the Eastern

heresies had got into Carthage. Augustin must have still met Arians there,

although at this period Arianism was dying out in Africa. What is certain

is that orthodox Catholicism was in a very critical state. The Donatists

captured its congregations and churches; they were unquestionably in the

majority. They raised altar against altar. If Genethlius was the Catholic

bishop, the Donatist bishop was Parmenianus. And they claimed to be more

Catholic than their opponents. They boasted that they were the Church, the

single, the unique Church, the Church of Christ. But these schismatics

themselves were already splitting up into many sects. At the time Augustin

was studying at Carthage, Rogatus, Bishop of Tenes, had just broken

publicly with Parmenian's party. Another Donatist, Tyconius, published

books wherein he traversed many principles dear to his fellow-religionists.

Doubt darkened consciences. Amid these controversies, where was the truth?

Among whom did the Apostolic tradition dwell?

To put the finishing touch on this anarchy, a sect which likewise derived

from Christianity--Manicheeism--began to have numerous adepts in Africa.

Watched with suspicion by the Government, it concealed part of its

doctrine, the most scandalous and subversive. But the very mystery which

enveloped it, helped it to get adherents.

Among all these apostles preaching their gospel, these devotees beating

the drum before their god, these theologians reciprocally insulting and

excommunicating one another, Augustin brought the superficial scepticism of

his eighteenth year. He wanted no more of the religion in which his mother

had brought him up. He was a good talker, a clever dialectician; he was in

a hurry to emancipate himself, to win freedom for his way of thinking as

for his way of life; and he meant to enjoy his youth. With such gifts, and

with such dispositions, he could only choose among all these doctrines that

which would help most the qualities of his mind, at once flattering his

intellectual pretensions, and leaving his pleasure-loving instincts a loose

rein.

III

THE CARTHAGE STUDENT

However strong were the attractions of the great city, Augustin well knew

that he had not been sent there to amuse himself, or to trifle as an

amateur with philosophy. He was poor, and he had to secure his future--make

his fortune. His family counted on him. Neither was he ignorant of the

difficult position of his parents and by what sacrifices they had supplied

him with the means to finish his studies. Necessarily he was obliged to be

a student who worked.

With his extraordinary facility, he stood out at once among his

fellow-students. In the rhetoric school, where he attended lectures,

he was, he tells us, not only at the top, but he was the leader of his

companions. He led in everything. At that time, rhetoric was extremely

far-reaching: it had come to take in all the divisions of education,

including science and philosophy. Augustin claims to have learned all that

the masters of his time had to teach: rhetoric, dialectic, geometry, music,

mathematics. Having gone through the whole scholastic system, he thought of

studying law, and aided by his gift of words, to become a barrister. For a

gifted young man it was the shortest and surest road to money and honours.

Unhappily for him, hardly was he settled down at Carthage than his father

died. This made his future again problematical. How was he to keep up his

studies without the sums coming from his father? The affairs of Patricius

must have been left in the most parlous condition. But Monnica, clinging to

her ambitious plans for her son, knew how to triumph over all difficulties,

and she continued to send Augustin money. Romanianus, the Mæcenas of

Thagaste, who was doubtless applied to by her, came once more to the rescue

of the hard-up student. The young man, set at ease about his expenses,

resumed light-heartedly his studious and dissipated life.

As a matter of fact, this family bereavement does not seem to have caused

him much grief. In the \_Confessions\_ he mentions the death of his father in

a few words, and, so to speak, in parenthesis, as an event long foreseen

without much importance. And yet he owed him a great deal. Patricius was

hard pressed, and he took immense trouble to provide the means for his

son's education. But with the fine egotism of youth, Augustin perhaps

thought it enough to have profited by his father's sacrifices, and

dispensed himself from gratitude. In any case, his affection for his father

must have been rather lukewarm; the natural differences between them ran

too deep. In these years, Monnica filled all the heart of Augustin.

But the influence of Monnica herself was very slight upon this grown-up

youth, eighteen years old. He had forgotten her lessons, and it did not

trouble him much if his conduct added to the worries of the widow, who was

now struggling with her husband's creditors. At heart he was a good son and

he deeply loved his mother, but inevitably the pressure of the life around

him swept him along.

He has pictured his companions for us, after his conversion, as terrible

blackguards. No doubt he is too severe. Those young men were neither better

nor worse than elsewhere. They were rowdy, as they were in the other cities

of the Empire, and as one always is at that age. Imperial regulations

enjoined the police to have an eye on the students, to note their conduct

and what company they kept. They were not to become members of prohibited

societies, not to go too often to the theatre, nor to waste their time in

raking and feastings. If their conduct became too outrageous, they were to

be beaten with rods and sent back to their parents. At Carthage there was

a hard-living set of men who called themselves "The Wreckers." Their great

pleasure was to go and make a row at a professor's lecture; they would

burst noisily into the classroom and smash up anything they could lay hold

of. They amused themselves also by "ragging" the freshmen, jeering at their

simplicity, and playing them a thousand tricks. Things haven't much changed

since then. The fellow-students of Augustin were so like students of

to-day that the most modern terms suggest themselves to describe their

performances.

Augustin, who was on the whole well conducted, and, as behoved a future

professor, had a respect for discipline, disapproved of "The Wreckers" and

their violence. This did not prevent him from enjoying himself in their

society. He was overcome with shame because he could not keep pace with

them--we must believe it at least, since he tells us so himself. With a

certain lack of assurance, blended however with much juvenile vanity, he

joined the band. He listened to that counsel of vulgar wisdom which is

disastrous to souls like his: "Do as others do." He accordingly did do

as the others; he knew all their debauchery, or he imagined he did, for

however low he went, he was never able to do anything mean. He was then so

far from the faith that he arranged love-trysts in the churches. "I was not

afraid to think of my lust, and plan a scheme for securing the deadly fruit

of sin, even within the walls of Thy church during the celebration of Thy

mysteries." We might be reading the confession of a sensualist of to-day.

One grows astonished at these morals, at once so old and so modern. What,

already! These young Christian basilicas, but newly sprung out of the

earth, where the men were strictly separated from the women--were they

already become places of assignation, where love-letters were slipped into

hands, and procuresses sold their furtive services!...

At length the great happiness for which Augustin had so long been sighing

was granted him: he loved and he was loved.

He loved as he indeed was able to love, with all the impetuosity of his

nature and all the fire of his temperament, with all his heart and all his

senses. "I plunged headlong into love, whose fetters I longed to wear." But

as he went at once to extremes, as he meant to give himself altogether,

and expected all in return, he grew irritated at not receiving this same

kind of love. It was never enough love for him. Yet he was loved, and the

very certainty of this love, always too poor to his mind, exasperated the

violence and pertinacity of his desire. "Because I was loved, I proudly

riveted round myself the chain of woe, to be soon scourged with the red-hot

iron rods of jealousy, torn by suspicions, fears, anger, and quarrels."

This was passion with chorus and orchestra, a little theatrical, with its

violences, its alternations between fury and ecstasy, such as an African,

steeped in romantic literature, would conceive it. Deceived, he flung

himself in desperate pursuit of the ever-flitting love. He had certainly

more than one passion. Each one left him more hungry than the last.

He was sensual, and he felt each time how brief is pleasure, in what a

limited circle all enjoyment turns. He was tender, eager to give himself;

and he saw plainly that one never gives oneself quite altogether, that even

in the maddest hours of surrender one always reserves oneself in secret,

keeping for oneself something of oneself; and he felt that most of the time

his tenderness got no answer. When the joyous heart brings the offering of

its love, the heart of her he loves is absent. And when it is there, on the

edge of the lips, decked and smiling to meet the loved one, it is the other

who is absent. Almost never do they join together, and they never join

together altogether. And so this Love, which claims to be constant and even

eternal, ought to be, if it would prolong itself, a continual act of faith,

and hope, and charity. To believe in it in spite of its darkening and

falling away; to hope its return, often against all evidence; to pardon its

injustices and sometimes its foul actions--how many are capable of such

abnegation? Augustin went through all that. He was in despair about it.

And then, the nostalgia of predestined souls took hold of him. He had an

indistinct feeling that these human loves were unworthy of him, and that

if he must have a master, he was born to serve another Master. He had a

desire to shake off the platitude of here below, the melancholy fen where

stagnated what he calls "the marsh of the flesh"; to escape, in a word,

from the wretched huts wherein for a little he had sheltered his heart; to

burn all behind him, and so prevent the weakness of a return; and to go and

pitch his tent further, higher, he knew not where--upon some unapproachable

mountain where the air is icy, but before the eyes, the vasty stretches of

light and space....

These first loves of Augustin were really too fierce to last. They

burned up themselves. Augustin did not keep them up long. There was in

him, besides, an instinct which counteracted his exuberant, amorous

sentimentality--the sense of beauty. That in itself was enough to make him

pause on the downhill of riot. The anarchy and commotion of passion was

repellent to a mind devoted to clearness and order. But there was still

another thing--the son of the Thagaste freeholder had any amount of common

sense. That at least was left to him of the paternal heritage. A youth of

what we call the lower middle class, strictly brought up in the hard and

frugal discipline of the provinces, he felt the effects of his training.

The bohemianism in which his friends revelled could not hold him

indefinitely. Besides this, the career he desired, that of a barrister

or professor, had a preliminary obligation to maintain a certain outward

decorum. He himself tells us so; in the midst of his most disreputable

performances he aspired to be known for his fashion and wit--\_elegans atque

urbanus\_. Politeness of speech and manners, the courteous mutual deference

of the best society--such, was the ideal of this budding professor of

rhetoric.

Anxiety about his future, joined to his rapid disenchantments, ere long

sobered the student: he just took his fling and then settled down. Love

turned for him into sensual habit. His head became clear for study and

meditation. The apprentice to rhetoric liked his business. Up to his

last breath, despite his efforts to change, he continued, like all his

contemporaries, to love rhetoric. He handled words like a worker in verbals

who is aware of their price and knows all their resources. Even after his

conversion, if he condemns profane literature as a poisoner of souls, he

absolves the beauty of language. "I accuse not words," he says. "Words

are choice and precious vessels. I accuse the wine of error that drunken

doctors pour out for us into these fair goblets." At the Rhetoric School he

took extreme pleasure in declaiming. He was applauded; the professor gave

him as an example to the others. These scholastic triumphs foretold others

more celebrated and reverberating. And so, in his heart, literary vanity

and ambition disputed the ever-lively illusions of love. And then, above

all! he had to live; Monnica's remittances were necessarily small; the

generosity of Romanianus had its limit. So he beat about to enlarge his

small student's purse. He wrote verses for poetic competitions. Perhaps

already he was able to act as tutor to certain of his fellow-students, less

advanced.

If the need of loving tormented his sentimental heart, he tried to assuage

it in friendship. He loved friendship as he loved love. He was a passionate

and faithful friend up to his death. At this time of his life, he was

riveting friendships which were never to be broken. He had beside him his

fellow-countryman, Alypius, the future Bishop of Thagaste, who had followed

him to Carthage and would, later on, follow him to Milan; Nebridius, a not

less dear companion, fated to die early; Honoratus, whom he drew into his

errors and later did his best to enlighten; and, finally, that mysterious

young man, whose name he does not tell us, and whose loss he mourned as

never any one has mourned the death of a friend.

They lived in daily and hourly intimacy, in continual fervour and

enthusiasm. They were great theatre-goers, where Augustin was able to

satisfy his desire for tender emotions and romantic adventures. They had

musical parties; they tried over again the popular airs heard at the

Odeum or some other of the innumerable theatres at Carthage. All the

Carthaginians, even the populace, were mad about music. The Bishop of

Hippo, in his sermons, recalls a mason upon his scaffolding, or a shoemaker

in his stall, singing away the tunes of well-known musicians. Then our

students strolled on the quays or in the Harbour Square, contemplating

the many-coloured sea, this splendour of waters at the setting sun, which

Augustin will extol one day with an inspiration unknown to the ancient

poets. Above all, they fell into discussions, commented what they had

lately read, or built up astonishing plans for the future. So flowed by a

happy and charming life, abruptly interpolated with superb anticipations.

With what a full heart the Christian penitent calls it back for us!--"What

delighted me in the intercourse of my friends, was the talk, the laughter,

the good turns we did each other, the common study of the masters of

eloquence, the comradeship, now grave now gay, the differences that left

no sting, as of a man differing with himself, the spice of disagreement

which seasoned the monotony of consent. Each by turns would instruct or

listen; impatiently we missed the absent friend, and savoured the joy of

his return. We loved each other with all our hearts, and such tokens of

friendship springing from the heart and displayed by a word, a glance, an

expression, by a thousand pretty complaisances, supply the heat which welds

souls together, and of many make one."

It is easily understood that such ties as these had given Augustin a

permanent disgust for his rowdy comrades of a former time: he went no more

with "The Wreckers." The small circle he took pleasure in was quiet and

cheerful. Its merriment was controlled by the African gravity. He and his

friends come before my eyes, a little like those students of theology, or

those cultivated young Arabs, who discuss poetry, lolling indolently upon

the cushions of a divan, while they roll between their fingers the amber

beads of their rosary, or walking slowly under the arcades of a mosque,

draped in their white-silk simars, with a serious and meditative air,

gestures elegant and measured, courteous and harmonious speech, and

something discreet, polite, and already clerical in their tone and manners.

In fact, the life which Augustin was at that time relishing was the pagan

life on its best and gentlest side. The subtle network of habits and daily

occupations enveloped him little by little. There was some risk of his

growing torpid in this soft kind of life, when suddenly a rude shock roused

him.... It was a chance, but in his eyes a providential chance, which put

the \_Hortensius\_ of Cicero between his hands. Augustin was about nineteen,

still a student; according to the order which prevailed in the schools,

the time had come for him to read and explain this philosophical dialogue.

He had no curiosity about the book. He took it from his sense of duty as

a student, because it figured on the schedule. He unrolled the book, and

began it, doubtless with calm indifference. All of a sudden, a great

unexpected light shone between the lines. His heart throbbed. His whole

soul sprang towards these phrases, so dazzling and revealing. He awoke

from his long drowsiness. Before him shone a marvellous vision.... As this

dialogue is lost, we can hardly to-day account for such enthusiasm, and

we hold that the Roman orator was a very middling philosopher. We know,

however, through Augustin himself, that the book contained an eloquent

praise of wisdom. And then, words are naught without the soul of the

reader; all this, falling into Augustin's soul, rendered a prolonged and

magnificent sound. It is evident, too, that just at the moment when he

unrolled the book he was in a condition to receive this uplifting summons.

In such minutes, when the heart, ignorant of itself, swells like the sea

before a storm, when all the inner riches of the being overflow, the

slightest glimmer is enough to reveal all these imprisoned forces, and the

least shock to set them free.

He has at least preserved for us, in pious and faithful gratitude, some

phrases of this dialogue which moved him so deeply. Especially does he

admire this passage, wherein the author, after a long discussion, ends in

these terms: "If, as pretend the philosophers of old time, who are also

the greatest and most illustrious, we have a soul immortal and divine, it

behoves us to think, that the more it has persevered in its way, that is to

say, in reason, love, and the pursuit of truth, and the less it has been

intermingled and stained in human error and passion, the easier will it be

for it to raise itself and soar again to the skies."

Such phrases, read in a certain state of mind, might well overwhelm this

young man, who was ere long to yearn for the cloister and was destined to

be the founder of African monasticism. To give his whole life to the study

of wisdom, to compel himself towards the contemplation of God, to live

here below an almost divine life--this ideal, impossible to pagan wisdom,

Augustin was called to realize in the name of Christ. That had dawned on

him, all at once, while he was reading the \_Hortensius\_. And this ideal

appeared to him so beautiful, so well worth the sacrifice of all he had

hitherto loved, that nothing else counted for him any more. He despised

rhetoric, the vain studies it compelled him to pursue, the honour and glory

it promised him. What was all that to the prize of wisdom? For wisdom he

felt himself ready to give up the world.... But these heroic outbursts

do not, as a rule, keep up very long in natures so changeable and

impressionable as Augustin's. Yet they are not entirely thrown away.

Thus, in early youth, come dim revelations of the future. There comes a

presentiment of the port to which one will some day be sailing; a glimpse

of the task to fulfil, the work to build up; and all this rises before the

eyes in an entrancement of the whole being. Though the bright image be

eclipsed, perhaps for years, the remembrance of it persists amid the worst

degradations or the worst mediocrities. He who one single time has seen it

pass, can never afterwards live quite like other people.

This fever calmed, Augustin set himself to reflect. The ancient

philosophers promised him wisdom. But Christ also promised it! Was it not

possible to reconcile them? And was not the Gospel ideal essentially more

human than that of the pagan philosophers? Suppose he tried to submit to

that, to bring the faith of his childhood into line with his ambitions as a

young man of intellect? To be good after the manner of his mother, of his

grandparents, of the good Thagaste servants, of all the humble Christian

souls whose virtues he had been taught to respect, and at the same time to

rival a Plato by the strength of thought--what a dream! Was it possible?...

He tells us himself that the illusion was brief, and that he grew cool

about the \_Hortensius\_ because he did not find the name of Christ in it. He

deceives himself, probably. At this time he was not so Christian. He yields

to the temptation of a fine phrase: when he wrote his \_Confessions\_ he had

not yet entirely lost this habit.

But what remains true is, that feeling the inadequateness of pagan

philosophy, he returned for a moment towards Christianity. The Ciceronian

dialogue, by disappointing his thirst for the truth, gave him the idea of

knocking at the door of the Church and trying to find out if on that side

there might not be a practicable road for him. This is why the reading

of \_Hortensius\_ is in Augustin's eyes one of the great dates of his life.

Although he fell back in his errors, he takes credit for his effort.

He recognizes in it the first sign, and, as it were, a promise of his

conversion. "Thenceforth, my God, began my upward way, and my return

towards Thee."

He began then to study the Holy Scriptures with a more or less serious

intention to instruct himself in them. But to go to the Bible by way of

Cicero was to take the worst road. Augustin got lost there. This direct

popular style, which only cares about saying things, and not about how they

are said, could only repel the pupil of Carthage rhetoricians, the imitator

of the harmonious Ciceronian sentences. Not only had he much too spoiled

a taste in literature, but there was also too much literature in this

pose of a young man who starts off one fine morning to conquer wisdom. He

was punished for his lack of sincerity, and especially of humility. He

understood nothing of the Scripture, and "I found it," he says, "a thing

not known to the proud, nor yet laid open to children, but poor in

appearance, lofty in operation, and veiled in mysteries. At that time, I

was not the man to bow my head so as to pass in at its door."...

He grew tired very quickly. He turned his back on the Bible, as he

had thrown aside \_Hortensius\_, and he went to find pasture elsewhere.

Nevertheless, his mind had been set in motion. Nevermore was he to know

repose, till he had found truth. He demanded this truth from all the sects

and all the churches. So it was, that in despair he flung himself into

Manicheeism.

Some have professed amazement that this honest and practical mind should

have stuck fast in a doctrine so tortuous, so equivocal, contaminated by

fancies so grossly absurd. But perhaps it is forgotten that there was

everything in Manicheeism. The leaders of the sect did not deliver the bulk

of the doctrine all at once to their catechumens; the entire initiation was

a matter of several degrees. Now Augustin never went higher than a simple

\_auditor\_ in the Manichean Church. What attracted specially fine minds to

the Manichees, was that they began by declaring themselves rationalists.

To reconcile faith with natural science and philosophy has been the fad

of heresiarchs and free-thinkers in all ages. The Manicheans bragged that

they had succeeded. They went everywhere, crying out: "Truth, Truth!" That

suited Augustin very well: it was just what he was looking for. He hastened

to the preachings of these humbugs, impatient to receive at last this

"truth," so noisily announced. From what they said, it was contained in

several large books written by their prophet under the guidance of the Holy

Ghost. There was quite a library of them. By way of bamboozling the crowd,

they produced some of them which looked very important, ponderous as

Tables of the Law, richly bound in vellum, and embellished with striking

illuminations. How was it possible to doubt that the entire revelation was

contained in such beautiful books? One felt at once full of respect for a

religion which was able to produce in its favour the testimony of such a

mass of writings.

However, the priests did not open them. To allay the impatience of their

hearers, they amused them by criticizing the books and dogmas of the

Catholics. This preliminary criticism was the first lesson of their

instruction. They pointed out any number of incoherences, absurdities,

and interpolations in the Bible: according to them, a great part of the

Scriptures had been foisted on the world by the Jews. But they triumphed

especially in detecting the contradictions of the Gospel narratives. They

sapped them with syllogisms. It is easy to understand that these exercises

in logic should have at once attracted the youthful Augustin. With his

extraordinary dialectical subtilty, he soon became very good at it

himself--much better even than his masters. He made speeches in their

assemblies, fenced against a text, peremptorily refuted it, and reduced his

adversaries to silence. He was applauded, covered with praise. A religion

which brought him such successes must be the true one.

After he became a bishop, he tried to explain to himself how it was that

he fell into Manicheeism, and could find only two reasons. "The first,"

he says, "was a friendship which took hold of me under I know not what

appearance of kindness, and was like a cord about my neck.... The second

was those unhappy victories that I almost always won in our disputes."

But there is still another which he mentions elsewhere, and it had

perhaps the most weight. This was the loose moral code which Manicheeism

authorized. This doctrine taught that we are not responsible for the evil

we do. Our sins and vices are the work of the evil Principle--the God of

Darkness, enemy of the God of Light. Now at the moment when Augustin was

received as \_auditor\_ by the Manichees, he had a special need of excusing

his conduct by a moral system so convenient and indulgent. He had just

formed his connection with her who was to become the mother of his child.

IV

THE SWEETNESS OF TEARS

Augustin was nearly twenty. He had finished his studies in rhetoric within

the required time. According to the notions of that age, a young man

ought to have concluded his course by his twentieth year. If not, he was

considered past mending and sent back there and then to his family.

It may appear surprising that a gifted student like Augustin did not finish

his rhetoric course sooner. But after his terms at Madaura, he had lost

nearly a year at Thagaste. Besides, the life of Carthage had so many charms

for him that doubtless he was in no hurry to leave. However that may be,

the moment was now come for him to make up his mind about his career.

The wishes of his parents, the advice of his masters, as well as his own

ambitions and qualities, urged him, as we know, to become a barrister. But

now, suddenly, all his projects for the future changed. Not only did he

give up the law, but at the very moment when all appeared to smile on him,

at the opening of his youth, he left Carthage to go and bury himself as a

teacher of grammar in the little free-town his birthplace.

As he has neglected to give any explanation of this sudden determination,

we are reduced to conjectures. It is likely that his mother was bothered

about household expenses and could no longer afford to keep him at

Carthage. Besides, she had other children, a son and daughter, to start in

life. Augustin was on the point of being, if not poor, at least very hard

up. He must do something to earn his living, and as quickly as possible.

In these conditions, the quickest way out of the difficulty was to sell

to others what he had bought from his masters. To live, he would open a

word-shop, as he calls it disdainfully. But as he had only just ceased to

be a student, he could not dream of becoming a professor in a great city

such as Carthage, and setting himself up in rivalry to so many celebrated

masters. The best thing he could do, if he did not want to vegetate, was to

fall back on some more modest post. Now his protector, Romanianus, wanted

him to go to Thagaste. This rich man had a son almost grown up, whom it was

necessary to put as soon as possible in the hands of a tutor. Augustin,

so often helped by the father, was naturally thought of to look after the

youth. Furthermore, Romanianus, who appreciated Augustin's talent, must

have been anxious to attract him to Thagaste and keep him there. With an

eye to the interests of his free-town, he desired to have such a shining

light in the place. So he asked this young man, whom he patronized, to

return to his native district and open a grammar school. He promised

him pupils, and, above all, the support of his influence, which was

considerable, Monnica, as we may conjecture, added her entreaties to those

of the great head of the Thagaste municipality. Augustin yielded.

Did it grieve him very much to make up his mind to this exile? It must have

been extremely hard for a young man of twenty to give up Carthage and its

pleasures. Moreover, it is pretty nearly certain that at this time he had

already started that connection which was to last so long. To leave a

mistress whom he loved, and that in all the freshness of a passion just

beginning--one wonders how he was able to make up his mind to it. And yet

he did leave, and spent nearly a year at Thagaste.

One peculiar mark of the youth, and even of the whole life of Augustin, is

the ease with which he unlearns and breaks off his habits--the sentimental

as well as the intellectual. He used up a good many doctrines before

resting in the Catholic truth; and even afterwards, in the course of a

long life, he contradicted and corrected himself more than once in his

controversies and theological writings. His \_Retractations\_ prove this. One

might say that the accustomed weighs on him as a hindrance to his liberty;

that the look of the places where he lives becomes hateful to him as a

threat of servitude. He feels dimly that his true country is elsewhere, and

that if he must settle anywhere it is in the house of his Heavenly Father.

\_Inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te....\_ "Restless are our

hearts, O my God, until they rest in Thee." Long before St. Francis of

Assisi, he practised the mystic rule: "As a stranger and a pilgrim." It is

true that in his twentieth year he was very far from being a mystic. But he

already felt that restlessness which made him cross the sea and roam Italy

from Rome to Milan. He is an impulsive. He cannot resist the mirages of his

heart or his imagination. He is always ready to leave. The road and its

chances tempt him. He is eager for the unknown. He lets himself be carried

in delight by the blowing wind. God calls him; he obeys without knowing

where he goes. This unsettled young man, halting between contrary passions,

who feels at home nowhere, has already the soul of an apostle.

This changeableness of mood was probably the true cause of his departure

for Thagaste. But other more apparent reasons, reasons more patent to a

juvenile consciousness, guided him also. No doubt he was not sorry to

reappear in his little town, although he was so young, with the importance

and authority of a master. His former companions were going to become his

pupils. And then the Manichees had fanaticized him. Carried away by the

neophyte's bubbling zeal, elevated by his triumphs at the public meetings

in Carthage, he meant to shine before his fellow-countrymen, and perhaps

convert them. He departed with his mind made up to proselytize. Let us

believe also, that in spite of his dissolute life, and the new passion that

filled his heart, he did not come back to Thagaste without an affectionate

thought at the back of his head for his mother.

The reception that Monnica had in reserve for him was going to surprise him

considerably. Since her widowhood, the wife of Patricius had singularly

advanced in the way of Christian perfection. The early Church not only

offered widows the moral help of its sacraments and consolations, it also

granted a special dignity with certain privileges to those who made a vow

to refrain from sex-intercourse. They had in the basilicas, even as the

consecrated virgins, a place of honour, divided from that of the other

matrons by a balustrade. They wore a special dress. They were obliged to

a conduct which would shew them worthy of all the outer marks of respect

which surrounded them. The austerity of Monnica had increased with the zeal

of her faith. She set an example to the Church people at Thagaste. Docile

to the teachings of her priests, eager to serve her brethren, multiplying

alms as much as she could with her straitened means, she was unfailing at

the services of the Church. Twice daily, morning and evening, she might be

seen, exact to the hour of prayer and sermon. She did not go there, her son

assures us, to mingle in cabals and the gossip of pious females, but to

hear God's word in homily, and that God might hear her in prayer.

The widow compelled all who were about her to the same severe rule which

she herself observed. In this rigid atmosphere of his home, the student

from Carthage, with his free, fashionable airs, must have caused a painful

astonishment. Monnica felt at once that she and her son understood each

other no longer. She began by remonstrating with him. Augustin rebelled.

Things got worse when, with his presumption of the young professor

new-enamelled by the schools, the harsh and aggressive assurance of the

heresiarch, he boasted as loud as he could of being a Manichee. Monnica,

deeply wounded in her piety and motherly tenderness, ordered him to give up

his errors. He refused, and only replied by sarcasms to the poor woman's

complaints. Then she must have believed that the separation was final, that

Augustin had committed an irreparable crime. Being an African Christian,

absolute in her faith and passionate for its defence, she regarded her

son as a public danger. She was filled with horror at his treason. It is

possible, too, that guided by the second-sight of her affection, she saw

clearer into Augustin's heart than he did himself. She was plunged in

sorrow that he mistook himself to this extent, and refused the Grace which

desired to win him to the Catholic unity. And as he was not content with

losing himself, but also drew others into peril--disputing, speech-making

before his friends, abusing his power of language to throw trouble into

consciences--Monnica finally made up her mind. She forbade her son to eat

at her table, or to sleep under her roof. She drove him from the house.

This must have been a big scandal in Thagaste. It does not appear, however,

that Augustin cared much. In all the conceit of his false knowledge, he had

that kind of inhumanity which drives the intellectual to make litter of the

sweetest and deepest feelings as a sacrifice to his abstract idol. Not only

did he not mind very much if his apostasy made his mother weep, but he did

not trouble, either, to reconcile the chimeras of his brain with the living

reality of his soul and the things of life. Whatever he found inconvenient,

he tranquilly denied, content if he had talked well and entangled his

adversary in the net of his syllogisms.

Put in interdict by Monnica, he simply went and quartered himself on

Romanianus. The sumptuous hospitality he received there very soon consoled

him for his exile from his home. And if his self-esteem had been affronted,

the pride of living familiarly with so important a personage was, for a

vain young man, a very full compensation.

In fact, this Romanianus roused the admiration of the whole country by his

luxury and lavish expenditure. He was bound to ruin himself in the long

run, or, at any rate, to raise up envious people bent upon his ruin. Being

at the head of the Decurions, he was the protector, not only of Thagaste,

but of the neighbouring towns. He was the great patron, the influential

man, who had nearly the whole country for his dependents. The town council,

through gratitude and flattery, had had his name engraved upon tables of

brass, and had put up statues to him. It had even conferred powers on him

wider than municipal powers. The truth is that Romanianus did not dole

out his benefactions to his fellow-citizens. He gave them bear-fights and

other spectacles till then unknown at Thagaste. He did not grudge public

banquets, and every day a free meal was to be got at his house. The guests

were served plentifully. After having eaten his dinner, they dipped in

the purse of the host. Romanianus knew the art of doing an obliging thing

discreetly, and even how to anticipate requests which might be painful. So

he was proclaimed unanimously, "the most humane, the most liberal, the most

polite and happiest of men."

Generous to his dependents, he did not forget himself. He built a villa

which, by the space it occupied, was a real palace, with \_thermæ\_ walled

in precious marbles. He passed his time in the baths, or gaming, or

hunting--in short, he led the life of a great landed proprietor of those

days.

No doubt these villas had neither the beauty nor the art-value of the great

Italian villas, which were a kind of museums in a pretty, or grand, natural

frame; but they did not lack charm. Some of them, like that of Romanianus,

were built and decorated at lavish expense. Immensely large, they took

in sometimes an entire village; and sometimes, also, the villa, properly

speaking, the part of the building where the master dwelt, was fortified,

closed in by walls and towers like a feudal castle. Upon the outer gates

and the entrance door might be read in big letters: "The Property of

So-and-so." Often, the inscription was repeated upon the walls of an

enclosure or of a farm, which really belonged to a dependent of the great

man. Under the shelter of the lord's name, these small-holders defended

themselves better against fiscal tyranny, or were included in the

immunities of their patrons. So was formed, under the cover of patronage,

a sort of African feudalism. Augustin's father, who owned vineyards, was

certainly a vassal of Romanianus.

As the African villa was a centre of agricultural activity, it maintained

on the estate a whole population of slaves, workmen, and small-holders.

The chief herdsman's house neighboured that of the forester. Through

deer-parks, enclosed by latticed fences, wandered gazelles. Oil factories,

vats and cellars for wine, ran on from the bath-buildings and the offices.

Then there was the main building with its immense doorway, its belvedere of

many stories, as in the Roman villas, its interior galleries, and wings to

the right and left of the \_atrium\_. In front lay the terraces, the gardens

with straight walks formed by closely-clipped hedges of box which led to

pools and jets of water, to arbours covered with ivy, to nymph-fountains

ornamented with columns and statues. In these gardens was a particular

place called the "philosopher's corner." The mistress of the house used to

go there to read or dream. Her chair, or folding-seat, was placed under the

shade of a palm tree. Her "philosopher" followed her, holding her parasol

and leading her little favourite dog.

It is easy to realize that Augustin managed to stand his mother's severity

without overmuch distress in one of these fine country houses. To be

comfortable there, he had only to follow his natural inclination, which

was, he tells us, epicureanism. It is most certain that at this period

the only thing he cared about and sought after was pleasure. Staying

with Romanianus, he took his share in all the pleasant things of life,

\_suavitates illius vitæ\_--shared the amusements of his host, and only

bothered about his pupils when he had nothing better to do. He must have

been as little of a grammarian as possible--he hadn't the time. With

the tyrannical friendship of rich people, who are hard put to it to

find occupation, Romanianus doubtless monopolized him from morning till

night. They hunted together, or dined, or read poetry, or discussed in

the evergreen alleys of the garden or "the philosopher's corner." And

naturally, the recent convert to Manicheeism did his best to indoctrinate

and convert his patron--so far at least as a careless man like Romanianus

could be converted. Augustin accuses himself of having "flung" Romanianus

into his own errors. Augustin probably was not so guilty. His wealthy

friend does not seem to have had any very firm convictions. In all

likelihood, he was a pagan, a sceptical or hesitating pagan, such

as existed in numbers at that time. Led by Augustin, he drew near to

Manicheeism. Then, when Augustin gave up Manicheeism for Platonic

philosophy, we see Romanianus take the airs of a philosopher. Later, when

Augustin came back to Catholicism, he drew Romanianus in his wake towards

that religion. This man of fashion was one of those frivolous people who

never go deep into things, for whom ideas are only a pastime, and who

consider philosophers or men of letters as amusers. But it is certain

that he liked to listen to Augustin, and let himself be influenced. If he

trifled with Manicheeism, the reason was that Augustin dazzled him with his

arguments and fine phrases. This orator of twenty had already extraordinary

charm.

So Augustin led a delightful life with Romanianus. Everything pleased

him--his talking triumphs, the admiration of his hearers, the flattery

and luxury which surrounded him. Meanwhile, Monnica was plunged in grief

at his conduct, and implored God to draw him from his errors. She began

to be sorry that she had sent him away, and with the clear-sightedness of

the Christian, she perceived that Romanianus' house was not good for the

prodigal. It would be better to have him back. Near her he would run less

risk of being corrupted. Through intense praying, came to her a dream

which quickened her determination. "She dreamed that she was weeping and

lamenting, with her feet planted on a wooden rule, when she saw coming

towards her a radiant youth who smiled upon her cheerfully. He asked the

reason of her sorrow and her daily tears ... and when she told him she was

bewailing my perdition, he bade her be of good comfort, look and see, for

where she was, there was I also. She looked, and saw me standing by her

side on the same rule."

Filled with joy by this promise from on high, Monnica asked her son to

come home. He did come back, but with the quibbles of the Sophist, the

rhetorician cavilled against his mother. He tried to upset her happiness.

He said to her:

"Since, according to your dream, we are to be both standing on the same

rule, that means that you are going to be a Manichean."

"No," answered Monnica. "\_He\_ did not say, where he is you will be, but

where you are he will be."

Augustin confesses that this strong good sense made a certain impression

on him. Nevertheless he did not change. For still nine years he remained a

Manichee.

As a last resource, Monnica begged a bishop she knew, a man deeply read in

the Scriptures, to speak with her son and refute his errors. But so great

was the reputation of Augustin as an orator and dialectician that the holy

man dared not try a fall with such a vigorous jouster. He answered the

mother very wisely, that a mind so subtle and acute could not long continue

in such gross sophisms. And he offered his own example, for he, too, had

been a Manichee. But Monnica pressed him with entreaties and tears. At last

the bishop, annoyed by her persistence, but at the same time moved by her

tears, answered with a roughness mingled with kindness and compassion:

"Go, go! Leave me alone. Live on as you are living. It cannot be that the

son of such tears should be lost."

\_Filius istarum lacrymarum\_: the son of such tears!... Was it indeed the

country bishop, or rather the rhetorician Augustin who, in a burst of

gratitude, hit upon this sublime sentence? Certain it is that later on

Augustin saw in his mother's tears as it were a first baptism whence he

came forth regenerate. After having borne him according to the flesh,

Monnica, by her tears and moans, gave him birth into the spiritual life.

Monnica wept because of Augustin. Monnica wept for Augustin. This is rather

astonishing in the case of so severe a mother--this African a trifle

rough. The expressions--tears and moans and weeping--occur so often in

her son's writings, that we are at first tempted to take them for pious

metaphors--figures of a sacred rhetoric. We suspect that Monnica's tears

must come from the Bible, an imitation of King David's penitential tears.

But it would be quite an error to believe that. Monnica wept real tears.

In her whole-hearted prayers she bedewed the pavement of the basilica; she

moistened the balustrade against which she leant her forehead. This austere

woman, this widow whose face nobody saw any more, whose body was shapeless

by reason of the mass of stuffs, grey and black, which wrapped her from

head to foot--this rigid Christian concealed a heart full of love. Love

such as this was then a perfectly new thing.

That an African woman should carry her piety to the point of fanaticism;

that she should work to conquer her son to her faith; that, if he strayed

from it, she should hate him and drive him out with curses--this has been

seen in Africa at all times. But that a mother should mourn at the thought

that her child is lost for another life; that she grows terror-stricken and

despairing when she thinks that she may possess a happiness in which he

will have no part, and walk in the gardens of Heaven while her child will

not be there--no, this had never been seen before. "Where I am you will

be," near me, against my heart, our two hearts meeting in the one same

love--in this union of souls, continued beyond the grave, lies all the

Christian sweetness and hope.

Augustin was no longer, or not yet, a Christian. But in his tears he is

the true son of his mother. This gift of tears that Saint Lewis of France

begged God with so much earnestness and contrition to grant him, Monnica's

son had to the full. "For him to weep was a pleasure." [1] He inebriated

himself with his tears. Now, just while he was at Thagaste, he lost a

friend whom he loved intensely. This death set free the fountain of tears.

They are not yet the holy tears which he will shed later before God, but

only poor human tears, more pathetic perhaps to our own weakness.

[Footnote 1: Sainte-Beuve.]

Who was this friend? He tells us in very vague terms. We only know that

they had grown up as boys together and had gone to the same schools; that

they had just passed a year together, probably at Carthage; that this young

man, persuaded by him, was become a Manichee; and that, in a word, they

loved passionately. Augustin, while speaking of him, recalls in a deeper

sense what Horace said of his friend Virgil: \_dimidium animæ\_--"O thou half

of my soul!"

Well, this young man fell gravely sick of a fever. As all hope was at an

end, they baptized him, according to the custom. He grew better, was almost

cured, "As soon as I was able to talk to him," says Augustin--"and that was

as soon as he could bear it, for I never left his side, and we were bound

up in one another--I ventured a jest, thinking that he would jest too,

about the baptism which he had received, when he could neither think nor

feel. But by this time he had been told of his baptism. He shrank from

me as from an enemy, and with a wonderful new-found courage, warned me

never to speak so to him again, if I wished to remain his friend. I was

so astounded and confused that I said no more, resolving to wait till

he should regain his strength, \_when I would tell him frankly what I

thought\_."

So, at this serious moment, he whom they called "the Carthaginian disputer"

was sorry not to be able to measure himself in a bout of dialectics with

his half-dead friend. The intellectual poison had so perverted his mind,

that it almost destroyed in him the feelings of common decency. But if his

head, as he acknowledges, was very much spoiled, his heart remained intact.

His friend died a few days after, and Augustin was not there. He was

stunned by it.

His grief wrought itself up to wildness and despair. "This sorrow fell like

darkness on my heart, and wherever I looked I saw nothing but death. My

country became a torture, my father's house a misery. All the pleasures

that I had shared with him, turned into hideous anguish now that he was

gone. My eyes sought for him everywhere, and found him not. I hated the

familiar scenes because he was not there, and they could no more cry to

me, 'Lo! he will come.' as they used when he was absent but alive...."

Then Augustin began to weep louder, he prolonged his weeping, finding

consolation only in tears. Monnica's tenderness was restrained; in him it

was given full vent and exaggerated. At that time, the Christian moderation

was unknown to him, as well as the measure which the good taste of the

ancients prompted. He has often been compared to the most touching

geniuses, to Virgil, to Racine, who had also the gift of tears. But

Augustin's tenderness is more abandoned, and, so to speak, more romantic.

It even works up, sometimes, into an unhealthy excitement.

To be full of feeling, as Augustin was then, is not only to feel with

excessive sensitiveness the least wounds, the slightest touches of love or

hate, nor is it only to give oneself with transport; but it is especially

to take delight in the gift of oneself, to feel at the moment of full

abandonment that one is communicating with something infinitely sweet,

which already has ceased to be the creature loved. It is love for love, it

is to weep for the pleasure of tears, it is to mix with tenderness a kind

of egoism avid of experiences. Having lost his friend, Augustin loathes all

the world. He repeats: "Tears were my only comfort. I was wretched, and

my wretchedness was dear to me." And accordingly, he did not want to be

consoled. But as, little by little, the terrors of that parting subsided,

he perceived himself that he played with grief and made a joy of his

tears. "My tears," he says, "were dearer to me than my friend had been."

By degrees the friend is almost forgotten. Though Augustin may hate life

because his friend has gone, he confesses naively that he would not have

sacrificed his existence for the sake of the dead. He surmises that what

is told of Orestes and Pylades contending to die for each other is but a

fable. Ultimately, he comes to write: "Perhaps I feared to die, \_lest the

other half of him whom I had loved so dearly, should perish\_." He himself,

in his \_Retractations\_, condemns this phrase as pure rhetoric. It remains

true that what was perhaps the deepest sorrow of his life--this sorrow so

sincere and painful which had "rent and bloodied his soul"--ended with a

striking phrase.

It should be added, that in a stormy nature like his, grief, like love,

wears itself out quickly. It burns up passion and sentiment as it does

ideas. When at length he regained his calm, everything appeared drab.

Thagaste became intolerable. With his impulsive temperament, his changeable

humour, he all at once hit upon a plan: To go back to Carthage and open a

rhetoric school. Perhaps, too, the woman he loved and had abandoned there

was pressing him to return. Perhaps she told him that she was about to

become a mother. Always ready to go away, Augustin scarcely hesitated.

It is more than likely that he did not consult Monnica. He only told

Romanianus, who, as he had all kinds of reasons for wanting to keep

Augustin at Thagaste, at first strongly objected. But the young man pointed

to his future, his ambition to win fame. Was he going to bury all that in a

little town?

Romanianus yielded, and with a generosity that is no longer seen, he paid

the expenses this time too.

V

THE SILENCE OF GOD

Augustin was going to live nine years at Carthage--nine years that he

squandered in obscure tasks, in disputes sterile or unfortunate for himself

and others--briefly, in an utter forgetfulness of his true vocation. "And

during this time Thou wert silent, O my God!" he cries, in recalling only

the faults of his early youth. Now, the silence of God lay heavy. And yet

even in those years his tormented soul had not ceased to appeal. "Where

wert Thou then, O my God, while I looked for Thee? Thou wert before me. But

I had drawn away from myself and I could not find myself. How much less,

then, could I find Thee."

This was certainly the most uneasy, and, at moments, the most painful time

of his life. Hardly was he got back to Carthage than he had to struggle

against ever-increasing money difficulties. Not only had he to get his

own living, but the living of others--possibly his mother's and that of

his brother and sister--at all events, he had to support his mistress and

the child. It is possible that the infant was born before its father left

Thagaste; if not, the birth must have occurred shortly after.

The child was called Adeodatus. There is a kind of irony in this name,

which was then usual, of Adeodatus--"Gift of God." This son of his sin, as

Augustin calls him, this son whom he did not want, and the news of whose

birth must have been a painful shock--this poor child was a gift of Heaven

which the father could have well done without. And then, when he saw him,

he was filled with joy, and he cherished him as a real gift from God.

He accepted his fatherhood courageously, and, as it happens in such

cases, he was drawn closer to his mistress, their association taking on

something of conjugal dignity. Did the mother of Adeodatus justify such

attachment--an attachment which was to last more than ten years? The

mystery in which Augustin intended that the woman he had loved the most

should remain enveloped for all time, is nearly impenetrable to us. No

doubt she was of a very humble, not to say low class, since Monnica judged

it impossible to bring about a marriage between the ill-assorted pair.

There must have been an extreme inequality between the birth and education

of the lovers. This did not prevent Augustin from loving his mistress

passionately, for her beauty perhaps, or perhaps for her goodness of heart,

or both. Nevertheless, it is surprising, that in view of his changing

humour, and his prompt and impressionable soul, he remained faithful to

her so long. What was to prevent his taking his son and going off? Ancient

custom authorized such an act. But Augustin was tender-hearted. He was

afraid to cause pain; he dreaded for others the wounds that caused him so

much suffering himself. So he stayed on from kindness, from pity, habit

too, and also because, in spite of everything, he loved the mother of his

child. Up to the time of his conversion, they lived like husband and wife.

So now, to keep his family, he really turns "a dealer in words." In spite

of his youth (he was barely twenty) the terms he had kept at Thagaste as

a teacher of grammar allowed him to take his place among the rhetoricians

at Carthage. Thanks to Romanianus, he got pupils at once. His protector at

Thagaste sent his son, that young Licentius whose education Augustin had

already begun, with one of his brothers, doubtless younger. It seems likely

that the two youths lived in Augustin's house. A small fact which their

master has preserved, looks like a proof of this. A spoon having been lost

in the house, Augustin, to find out where it was, told Licentius to go

and consult a wizard, one Albicerius, who had, just then, a great name in

Carthage. This message is scarcely to be explained unless we suppose the

lad was lodging in his professor's house. Another of the pupils is known to

us. This is Eulogius, who was later on a rhetorician at Carthage, and of

whom Augustin relates an extraordinary dream. Finally, there was Alypius,

a little younger than himself, his friend--"the brother of his heart," as

he calls him. Alypius had been attending his lessons at Thagaste. When the

schoolmaster abruptly threw up his employment, the father of the pupil

was angry, and in sending his son to Carthage, he forbade him to go near

Augustin's class. But it was difficult to keep such eager friends apart.

Little by little, Alypius overcame his father's objections, and became a

pupil of his friend.

Augustin's knowledge, when he began to lecture, could not have been very

deep, for he had only lately quitted the student's bench himself. His

duties forced him to learn what he did not know. In teaching he taught

himself. It was at this time that he did most of the reading which

afterwards added substance to his polemics and treatises. He tells us

himself that he read in those days all that he could lay hands on. He is

very proud of having read by himself and understood without any assistance

from a master, the \_Ten Categories\_ of Aristotle, which was considered one

of the most abstruse works of the Stagirite. In an age when instruction was

principally by word of mouth, and books comparatively rare, it is obvious

that Augustin was not what we call an "all-devouring reader." We do not

know if Carthage had many libraries, or what the libraries were worth. It

is no less true that the author of \_The City of God\_ is the last of the

Latin writers who had a really all-round knowledge. It is he who is the

link between modern times and pagan antiquity. The Middle Age hardly knew

classical literature, save by the allusions and quotations of Augustin.

So in spite of family and professional cares, he did not lose his

intellectual proclivities. The conquest of truth remained always his great

ambition. He still hoped to find it in Manicheeism, but he began to think

that it was a long time coming. The leaders of the sect could not have

trusted him thoroughly. They feared his acute and subtle mind, so quick

to detect the flaw in a thesis or argument. That is why they postponed

his initiation into their secret doctrines. Augustin remained a simple

\_auditor\_ in their Church. By way of appeasing the enormous activity of

his intelligence, they turned him on to controversy, and the critical

discussion of the Scriptures. Giving themselves out for Christians, they

adopted a part of them, and flung aside as interpolated or forged all that

was not in tune with their theology. Augustin, as we know, triumphed in

disputes of this kind, and was vain because he excelled in them.

And when he grew tired of this negative criticism and asked his evangelists

to give him more substantial food, they put him on some exoteric doctrine

calculated to appeal to a young imagination by its poetic or philosophical

colouring. The catechumen was not satisfied, but he put up with it for

lack of anything better. Very prettily he compares these enemies of the

Scriptures to the snarers of birds, who defile or fill with earth all the

water-places where the birds use to drink, save one mere; and about this

they set their snares. The birds all fly there, not because the water

is better, but because there is no other water, and they know not where

else to go and drink. So Augustin, not knowing where to quench his thirst

for truth, was fain to make the best of the confused pantheism of the

Manichees.

What remains noteworthy is, that however unstable his own convictions were,

he yet converted everybody about him. It was through him that his friends

became Manichees: Alypius one of the first; then Nebridius, the son of a

great landowner near Carthage; Honoratius, Marcianus; perhaps, too, the

youngest of his pupils, Licentius and his brother--all victims of his

persuasive tongue, which he exerted later on to draw them back from their

errors. So great was his charm--so deep, especially, was public credulity!

This fourth century was no longer a century of strong Christian faith. On

the other hand, the last agony of paganism was marked by a new attack of

the lowest credulity and superstition. As the Church energetically combated

both one and the other, it is not surprising that it was chiefly the

pagans who were contaminated. The old religion was to end by foundering in

magic. The greatest minds of the period, the neo-Platonists, the Emperor

Julian himself, were miracle-workers, or at any rate, adepts in the occult

sciences. Augustin, who was then separated from Christianity, followed the

general impulse, together with the young men he knew. Just now we saw him

sending to consult the soothsayer, Albicerius, about the loss of a spoon.

And this man of intellect believed also in astrologers and nigromancers.

Strips of lead have been found at Carthage upon which are written magic

spells against horses entered for races in the circus. Just like the

Carthaginian jockeys, Augustin had recourse to these hidden and fraudulent

practices, to make sure of success. On the eve of a verse competition in

the theatre, he fell in with a wizard who offered, if they could agree

about the price, to sacrifice a certain number of animals to buy the

victory. Upon this, Augustin, very much annoyed, declared that if the prize

were a crown of immortal gold, not a fly should be sacrificed to help him

win it. Really, magic was repellent to the honesty of his mind, as well

as to his nerves, by reason of the suspicious and brutal part of its

operations. As a rule, it was involved with haruspicy, and had a side of

sacred anatomy and the kitchen which revolted the sensitive--dissection

of flesh, inspection of entrails, not to mention the slaughtering and

strangling of victims. Fanatics, such as Julian, gave themselves up with

delight to these disgusting manipulations. What we know of Augustin's soul

makes it quite clear why he recoiled with horror.

Astrology, on the contrary, attracted him by its apparent science. Its

adepts called themselves "mathematicians," and thus seemed to borrow from

the exact sciences something of their solidity. Augustin often discussed

astrology with a Carthage physician, Vindicianus, a man of great sense

and wide learning, who even reached Proconsular honours. In vain did he

point out to the young rhetorician that the pretended prophecies of the

mathematicians were the effect of chance; in vain did Nebridius, less

credulous than his friend, join his arguments to those of the crafty

physician; Augustin clung obstinately to his chimera. His dialectical mind

discovered ingenious justifications for what the astrologers claimed.

Thus, dazzled by all the intellectual phantasms, he strayed from one

science to another, repeating meanwhile in his heart the motto of his

Manichean masters: "The Truth, the Truth!". But whatever might be the

attractions of the speculative life, he had first to face the needs of

actual life. The sight of his child called him back to a sense of his

position. To get money, and for that purpose to push himself forward, put

himself in evidence, increase his reputation--Augustin worked at that as

hard as he could. It led him to enter for the prize of dramatic poetry.

He was declared the winner. His old friend, the physician Vindicianus, who

was then Proconsul, placed the crown, as he says, upon his "disordered

head." The future Father of the Church writing for the theatre--and what a

theatre it was then!--is not the least extraordinary thing in this life so

disturbed and, at first sight, so contradictory.

It was also from literary ambition that about the same time he wrote a book

on æsthetics called \_Upon the Beautiful and the Fit\_, which he dedicated to

a famous colleague, the Syrian Hierius, "orator to the City of Rome," one

of the professors of the official education appointed either by the Roman

municipality or the Imperial treasury. This Levantine rhetorician had an

immense success in the capital of the Empire. His renown had got beyond

academical and fashionable circles and crossed the sea. Augustin admired

him on trust, like everybody else. It is clear that, at this time he could

not imagine a more glorious fortune for himself than to become, like

Hierius, orator to the City of Rome. Later in life, the Bishop of Hippo,

while condemning the vanity of his youthful ambitions, must have made some

extremely ironical reflections as to their modesty. How mistaken he was

about himself! An Augustin had dreamed of equalling one day this obscure

pedagogue, of whom nobody, save for him, would ever have spoken again. Men

of instinct, like Augustin, continually go wrong in this way about their

object and the means to employ. But their mistakes are only in appearance.

A will stronger than their own leads them, by mysterious ways, whither they

ought to go.

This first book of Augustin's is lost, and we are unable to say whether

there be any reason to regret it. He himself recalls it to us in a very

indifferent tone and rather vague terms. It would seem, however, that his

æsthetic had a basis of Manichean metaphysics. But what is significant for

us, in this youthful essay, is that the first time Augustin wrote as an

author it was to define and to praise Beauty. He did not yet know, at least

not directly from the text, the dialogues of Plato, and he is already

inclined to Platonism. He was this by nature. His Christianity will be a

religion all of light and beauty. For him, the supreme Beauty is identical

with the supreme Love. "Do we love anything," he used to say to his

friends, "except what is beautiful?" \_Num amamus aliquid, nisi pulchrum?\_

Again, at the end of his life, when he strives in \_The City of God\_ to

make clear for us the dogma of the resurrection of the body, he thinks our

bodies shall rise free from all earthly flaws, in all the splendour of the

perfect human type. Nothing of the body will be lost. It will keep all its

limbs and all its organs \_because they are beautiful\_. One recognizes in

this passage, not only the Platonist, but the traveller and art-lover, who

had gazed upon some of the finest specimens of ancient statuary.

This first book had hardly any success. Augustin does not even say whether

the celebrated Hierius paid him a compliment about it, and he has an air

of giving us to understand that he had no other admirer but himself. New

disappointments, more serious mortifications, changed little by little his

state of mind and his plans for the future. He was obliged to acknowledge

that after years of effort he was scarcely more advanced than at the start.

There was no chance to delude himself with vain pretences: it was quite

plain to everybody that the rhetorician Augustin was not a success. Now,

why was this? Was it that he lacked the gift of teaching? Perhaps he had

not the knack of keeping order, which is the most indispensable of all

for a schoolmaster. What suited him best no doubt was a small and select

audience which he charmed rather than ruled. Large and noisy classes he

could not manage. At Carthage, these rhetoric classes were particularly

difficult to keep in order, because the students were more rowdy than

elsewhere. At any moment "The Wreckers" might burst in and make a row.

Augustin, who had not joined in these "rags" when he was a student, saw

himself obliged to endure them as a professor. He had nothing worse to

complain of than his fellow-professors, in whose classes the same kind of

disturbance took place. That was the custom and, in a manner of speaking,

the rule in the Carthage schools. For all that, a little more authoritative

bearing would not have harmed him in the eyes of these disorderly boys. But

he had still graver defects for a professor who wants to get on: he was not

a schemer, and he could not make the most of himself.

It is quite possible that he did not possess the qualities which just then

pleased the pagan public in a rhetorician. The importance that the ancients

attached to physical advantages in an orator is well known. Now, according

to an old tradition, Augustin was a little man and not strong: till the end

of his life he complained of his health. He had a weak voice, a delicate

chest, and was often hoarse. Surely this injured him before audiences used

to all the outward emphasis and all the studied graces of Roman eloquence.

Finally, his written and spoken language had none of those brilliant and

ingenious curiosities of phrase which pleased in literary and fashionable

circles. This inexhaustibly prolific writer is not in the least a stylist.

In this respect he is inferior to Apuleius, or Tertullian, though he leaves

them far behind in the qualities of sincere and deep sentiment, poetic

flow, colour, the vividness of metaphor, and, besides, the emotion, the

suavity of the tone. With all that, no matter how hard he tried, he could

never grasp what the rhetoricians of his time understood by style. This is

why his writings, as well as his addresses, were not very much liked.

Nevertheless, good judges recognized his value, and guessed the powers,

lying still unformed within him, which he was misusing ere they were

mature. He was received at the house of the Proconsul Vindicianus, who

liked to talk with him, and treated him with quite fatherly kindness.

Augustin knew people in the best society. He did all his life. His charm

and captivating manners made him welcome in the most exclusive circles.

But just because he was valued by fashionable society, it came home to him

more painfully that he had not the position he deserved with the public

at large. Little by little his humour grew bitter. In this angry state of

mind he was no longer able to consider things with the same confidence and

serenity. His mental disquietudes took hold of him again.

His ideas were affected, first of all. He began to have doubts, more

and more definite, about Manicheeism. He began by suspecting the rather

theatrical austerity which the initiated of the sect made such a great

parade of. Among other turpitudes, he saw one day in one of the busiest

parts of Carthage "three of the Elect whinny after some women or other who

were passing, and begin making such obscene signs that they surpassed the

coarsest people for impudence and shamelessness." He was scandalized at

that; but, after all, it was a small thing. He himself was not so very

virtuous then. Generally your intellectual worries very little about

squaring his conduct with his principles, and does not bother about the

practical part. No; what was much worse in his eyes is that the Manichean

physical science, a congeries of fables more or less symbolical, suddenly

struck him as ruinous. He had just been studying astronomy, and he found

that the cosmology of the Manichees--of these men who called themselves

materialists--did not agree with scientific facts. Therefore Manicheeism

must be wrong universally, since it ran counter to reason confirmed by

experience.

Augustin spoke about his doubts, not only to his friends, but to the

priests of his sect. These got out of the difficulty by evasions and the

most dazzling promises. A Manichee bishop, a certain Faustus, was coming

to Carthage. He was a man of immense learning. Most certainly he would

refute every objection without the least trouble. He would confirm the

young \_auditors\_ in their faith.... So Augustin and his friends waited for

Faustus as for a Messiah. Their disappointment was immense. The supposed

doctor turned out to be an ignorant man, who possessed no tincture of

science or philosophy, and whose intellectual baggage consisted of nothing

but a little grammar. A delightful talker and a wit, the most he could do

was to discourse pleasantly on literature.

This disappointment, joined to the set-backs in his profession, brought

about a crisis of soul and conscience in Augustin. So this Truth which he

had sighed after so long, which had been so much promised to him, was only

a decoy! One must be content not to know!... Then what was left to do since

truth was unapproachable? Possibly fortune and honours would console him

for it. But he was far enough from them too. He felt that he was on the

wrong road, that he was getting into a rut at Carthage, as he had got into

a rut at Thagaste. He must succeed, whatever the cost!... And then he gave

way to one of those moments of weariness, when a man has no further hope of

saving himself save by some desperate step. He was sick of where he was and

of those about him. His friends, whom he knew too well, had nothing more

to teach him, and could not help him in the only search which passionately

interested him. And his entanglement became irksome. Here was nine years

that this sharing of bed and board had lasted. His son was at that

unattractive age which rather bores a young father than it revives an

affection already old. No doubt he did not want to abandon him. He did not

intend to break altogether with his mistress. But he felt the need of a

change of air, to take himself off somewhere else, where he could breathe

more freely and get fresh courage for his task.

Then it dawned on him to try his fortune at Rome. It was there that

literary reputations were made. He would find there, no doubt, better

judges than at Carthage. He would very likely end by getting a post in the

public instruction, with a steady salary--this would relieve him of present

worries, at all events. Probably he had already this plan in his head when

he sent his treatise \_On the Beautiful\_ to Hierius, orator to the City of

Rome; he thought that by this politeness he might depend, later, on the

backing of the well-known rhetorician. Lastly, his friends, Honoratius,

Marcianus, and the others, earnestly persuaded him to go and find a stage

worthy of him at Rome. Alypius, who was at this time finishing his law

studies there, and must have felt their separation, pressed him to come to

Rome and promised him success.

Once more, Augustin was ready to go away. He was not long in making up his

mind. He was going to leave all belonging to him, his mistress, his child,

till the time when his new position would enable him to send for them. He

himself tells us that the chief motive which led him to decide on this

journey was that the Roman students were said to be better disciplined

and less noisy than the students at Carthage. Evidently, that is a reason

which would weigh with a professor who objected to act the policeman in his

class. But besides the reasons we have given, there were others which must

have influenced his decision. Theodosius had lately ordered very heavy

penalties against the Manichees. Not only did he condemn them to death, but

he had instituted a perfect Inquisition, with the special duty of spying

upon and prosecuting these heretics. Did it occur to Augustin that he might

hide better in Rome, where he was unknown, than in a city where he was a

marked man on account of his proselytizing zeal? In any case, his departure

gave rise to calumnies which his adversaries, the Donatists, did not

fail many years later to bring up again and make worse. They accused him

of having run away from prosecution; he fled the country, so they said,

on account of a judgment which was out against him, pronounced by the

Proconsul Messianus. Augustin had no trouble in refuting these false

insinuations. But all these facts seem to prove that the most ordinary

prudence warned him to cross the sea as soon as possible.

Accordingly, he prepared to set sail. Let us hope that in spite of his

lofty indifference to material things, he made some provision for the

existence of the woman and child he left behind. As for her, she appeared

to agree without over-many violent scenes to this parting, which, he said,

was temporary. It was not the same with his mother. The very idea of Rome,

which seemed to her another Babylon, terrified this austere African woman.

What spiritual dangers lay in wait for her son there! She wanted to keep

him near her, both to bring him to the faith and also to love him--this

Augustin who had been her only human love. And then he was doubtless the

chief support of the widow. Without him, what was going to become of her?

The fugitive was forced to put a trick on Monnica so as to carry out his

plan. She would not leave him a moment, folded him in her arms, implored

him with tears not to go. The night he was to sail she followed him down to

the dock, although Augustin, to allay her suspicions, had told her a lie.

He pretended that he was only going down to the ship with a friend to see

him off. But Monnica, only half believing, followed. Night fell. Meanwhile,

the ship, anchored in a little bay to the north of the city, did not move.

The sailors were waiting till a wind rose to slip their moorings. The

weather was moist and oppressive, as it usually is in the Mediterranean in

August and September. There was not a breath of air. The hours passed on.

Monnica, overcome by heat and fatigue, could hardly stand. Then Augustin

cunningly persuaded her to go and pass the night in a chapel hard by, since

it was plain that the ship would not weigh anchor till dawn. After many

remonstrances, she at length agreed to rest in this chapel--a \_memoria\_

consecrated to St. Cyprian, the great martyr and patron of Carthage.

Like most of the African sanctuaries of those days, and the \_marabouts\_

of to-day, this one must have been either surrounded, or approached, by a

court with a portico in arcades, where it was possible to sleep. Monnica

sat down on the ground under her heap of veils among other poor people and

travellers, who were come like her to try to find a little cool air on this

stifling night near the relics of the blessed Cyprian. She prayed for her

child, offering to God "the blood of her heart," begging God not to let

him go, "for she loved to keep me with her" says Augustin, "as mothers are

wont, yes, far more than most mothers." And like a true daughter of Eve,

"weeping and crying, she sought again with groans the son she had brought

forth with groans." She prayed for a long time; then, worn out with sorrow,

she slept. The porter of the chapel, without knowing it, watched that

night not only the mother of the rhetorician Augustin, but the ancestor

of an innumerable line of souls; this humble woman, who slept there on

the ground, on the flags of the courtyard, carried in her heart all the

yearning of all the mothers of the future.

While she slept, Augustin went stealthily on board. The silence and the

tempered splendour of the night weighed him down. Sometimes the cry of the

sailors on watch took a strange note in the lustrous vaporous spaces. The

Gulf of Carthage gleamed far off under the scintillation of the stars,

under the palpitating of a milky way all white like the flowers of the

garden of Heaven. But Augustin's heart was heavy, heavier than the air

weighted by the heat and sea-damp--heavy from the lie and the cruelty he

had just committed. He saw already the awakening and sorrow of his mother.

His conscience was troubled, overcome by remorse and forebodings....

Meanwhile, his friends tried to cheer him, and urged him to have courage

and hope. Marcianus, while embracing him, reminded him of the verses of

Terence:

"This day which brings to thee another life

Demands that thou another man shalt be."

Augustin smiled sadly. At last the ship began to move. The wind had risen,

the wind of the grand voyage which was bearing him to the unknown....

Suddenly, at the keen freshness of the open sea, he thrilled. His strength

and confidence rushed back. To go away! What enchantment for all those who

cannot fasten themselves to a corner of the earth, who know by instinct

that they belong \_elsewhere\_, who always pass "as strangers and as

pilgrims," and who go away with relief, as if they cast a burthen behind

them. Augustin was of those people--of those who, among the fairest

attractions of the Road, never cease to think of the Return. But he knew

not where God was leading him. Marcianus was right: a new life was really

beginning for him; only it was not the life that either of them hoped for.

He who departed as a rhetorician, to sell words, was to come back as an

apostle, to conquer souls.

THE THIRD PART

THE RETURN

Et ecce ibi es in corde eorum, in corde confitentium tibi, et

projicientium se in te, et plorantium in sinu tuo, post vias suas

difficiles.

"And behold! Thou art there in their hearts, in the hearts of

that confess to Thee, and cast themselves upon Thee, and sob upon Thy

breast, after their weary ways."

\_Confessions\_, V, 2.

I

THE CITY OF GOLD

Augustin fell ill just after he got to Rome. It would seem that he arrived

there towards the end of August or beginning of September, before the

students reassembled, just at the time of heat and fevers, when all Romans

who could leave the city fled to the summer resorts on the coast.

Like all the great cosmopolitan centres at that time, Rome was unhealthy.

The diseases of the whole earth, brought by the continual inflow of

foreigners, flourished there. Accordingly, the inhabitants had a panic fear

of infection, like our own contemporaries. People withdrew prudently from

those suffering from infectious disorders, who were left to their unhappy

fate. If, from a sense of shame, they sent a slave to the patient's

bedside, he was ordered to the sweating-rooms, and there disinfected from

head to foot, before he could enter the house again.

Augustin must have had at least the good luck to be well looked after,

since he recovered. He had gone to the dwelling of one of his Manichee

brethren, an \_auditor\_ like himself, and an excellent kind of man, whom he

stayed with all the time he was in Rome. Still, he had such a bad attack of

fever that he very nearly died. "I was perishing," he says; "and I was all

but lost." He is frightened at the idea of having seen death so near, at a

moment when he was so far from God--so far, in fact, that it never occurred

to him to ask for baptism, as he had done, in like case, when he was

little. What a desperate blow would that have been for Monnica! He still

shudders when he recalls the danger: "Had my mother's heart been smitten

with that wound, it never could have been healed. \_For I cannot express

her tender love towards me\_, or with how far greater anguish she travailed

of me now in the spirit, than when she bore me in the flesh." But Monnica

prayed. Augustin was saved. He ascribes his recovery to the fervent prayers

of his mother, who, in begging of God the welfare of his soul, obtained,

without knowing it, the welfare of his body.

As soon as he was convalescent, he had to set to work to get pupils. He was

obliged to ask the favours of many an important personage, to knock at many

an inhospitable door. This unfortunate beginning, the almost mortal illness

which he was only just recovering from, this forced drudgery--all that did

not make him very fond of Rome. It seems quite plain that he never liked

it, and till the end of his life he kept a grudge against it for the sorry

reception it gave him. In the whole body of his writings it is impossible

to find a word of praise for the beauty of the Eternal City, while, on

the contrary, one can make out through his invectives against the vices

of Carthage, his secret partiality for the African Rome. The old rivalry

between the two cities was not yet dead after so many centuries. In

his heart, Augustin, like a good Carthaginian--and because he was a

Carthaginian--did not like Rome.

The most annoying things joined together as if on purpose to disgust him

with it. The bad season of the year was nigh when he began to reside there.

Autumn rains had started, and the mornings and evenings were cold. What

with his delicate chest, and his African constitution sensitive to cold,

he must have suffered from this damp cold climate. Rome seemed to him a

northern city. With his eyes still full of the warm light of his country,

and the joyous whiteness of the Carthage streets, he wandered as one exiled

between the gloomy Roman palaces, saddened by the grey walls and muddy

pavements. Comparisons, involuntary and continual, between Carthage and

Rome, made him unjust to Rome. In his eyes it had a hard, self-conscious,

declamatory look, and gazing at the barren Roman \_campagna\_, he remembered

the laughing Carthage suburbs, with gardens, villas, vineyards, olivets,

circled everywhere by the brilliance of the sea and the lagoons.

And then, besides, Rome could not be a very delightful place to live in for

a poor rhetoric master come there to better his fortune. Other strangers

before him had complained of it. Always to be going up and down the flights

of steps and the ascents, often very steep, of the city of the Seven Hills;

to be rushing between the Aventine and Sallust's garden, and thence to

the Esquiline and Janiculum! To bruise the feet on the pointed cobbles of

sloping alley-ways! These walks were exhausting, and there seemed to be no

end to this city. Carthage was also large--as large almost as Rome. But

there Augustin was not seeking employment. When he went for a walk there,

he strolled. Here, the bustle of the crowds, and the number of equipages,

disturbed and exasperated the southerner with his lounging habits. Any

moment there was a risk of being run over by cars tearing at full gallop

through the narrow streets: men of fashion just then had a craze for

driving fast. Or again, the passenger was obliged to step aside so

that some lady might go by in her litter, escorted by her household,

from the handicraft slaves and the kitchen staff, to the eunuchs and

house-servants--all this army manoeuvring under the orders of a leader who

held a rod in his hand, the sign of his office. When the street became

clear once more, and at last the palace of the influential personage

to whom a visit had to be paid was reached, there was no admittance

without greasing the knocker. In order to be presented to the master,

it was necessary to buy the good graces of the slave who took the name

(\_nomenclator\_), and who not only introduced the suppliant, but might, with

a word, recommend or injure. Even after all these precautions, one was not

yet sure of the goodwill of the patron. Some of these great lords, who were

not always themselves sprung from old Roman families, prided themselves

upon their uncompromising nationalism, and made a point of treating

foreigners with considerable haughtiness. The Africans were regarded

unfavourably in Rome, especially in Catholic circles. Augustin must have

had an unpleasant experience of this.

Through the long streets, brilliantly lighted at evening (it would seem

that the artificial lighting of Rome almost equalled the daylight), he

would return tired out to the dwelling of his host, the Manichee. This

dwelling, according to an old tradition, was in the Velabrum district, in

a street which is still to-day called \_Via Greca\_, and skirts the very old

church of Santa Maria-in-Cosmedina--a poor quarter where swarmed a filthy

mass of Orientals, and where the immigrants from the Levantine countries,

Greeks, Syrians, Armenians, Egyptians, lodged. The warehouses on the Tiber

were not very far off, and no doubt there were numbers of labourers,

porters, and watermen living in this neighbourhood. What a place for

him who had been at Thagaste the guest of the magnificent Romanianus,

and intimate with the Proconsul at Carthage! When he had climbed up the

six flights of stairs to his lodging, and crouched shivering over the

ill-burning movable hearth, in the parsimonious light of a small bronze or

earthenware lamp, while the raw damp sweated through the walls, he felt

more and more his poverty and loneliness. He hated Rome and the stupid

ambition which had brought him there. And yet Rome should have made a vivid

appeal to this cultured man, this æsthete so alive to beauty. Although the

transfer of the Court to Milan had drawn away some of its liveliness and

glitter, it was still all illuminated by its grand memories, and never had

it been more beautiful. It seems impossible that Augustin should not have

been struck by it, despite his African prejudices. However well built the

new Carthage might be, it could not pretend to compare with a city more

than a thousand years old, which at all periods of its history had

maintained the princely taste for building, and which a long line of

emperors had never ceased to embellish.

When Augustin landed at Ostia, he saw rise before him, closing the

perspective of the \_Via Appia\_, the Septizonium of Septimus Severus--an

imitation, doubtless, on a far larger scale, of the one at Carthage. This

huge construction, water-works probably of enormous size, with its ordered

columns placed line above line, was, so to speak, the portico whence opened

the most wonderful and colossal architectural mass known to the ancient

world. Modern Rome has nothing at all to shew which comes anywhere near it.

Dominating the Roman Forum, and the Fora of various Emperors--labyrinths of

temples, basilicas, porticoes, and libraries--the Capitol and the Palatine

rose up like two stone mountains, fashioned and sculptured, under the heap

of their palaces and sanctuaries. All these blocks rooted in the soil,

suspended, and towering up from the flanks of the hills, these interminable

regiments of columns and pilasters, this profusion of precious marbles,

metals, mosaics, statues, obelisks--in all that there was something

enormous, a lack of restraint which disturbed the taste and floored the

imagination. But it was, above all, the excessive use of gold and gilding

that astonished the visitor. Originally indigent, Rome became noted for

its greed of gold. When the gold of conquered nations began to come into

its hands, it spread it all over with the rather indiscreet display of

the upstart. When Nero built the Golden House he realized its dream. The

Capitol had golden doors. Statues, bronzes, the roofs of temples, were all

gilded. All this gold, spread over the brilliant surfaces and angles of

the architecture, dazzled and tired the eyes: \_Acies stupet igne metalli\_,

said Claudian. For the poets who have celebrated it, Rome is the city of

gold--\_aurata Roma\_.

A Greek, such as Lucian, had perhaps a right to be shocked by this

architectural debauch, this beauty too crushing and too rich. A Carthage

rhetorician, like Augustin, could feel at the sight of it nothing but the

same irritated admiration and secret jealousy as the Emperor Constans felt

when he visited his capital for the first time.

Even as the Byzantine Cæsar, and all the provincials, Augustin, no doubt,

examined the curiosities and celebrated works which were pointed out to

strangers: the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus; the baths of Caracalla and

Diocletian; the Pantheon; the temple of Roma and of Venus; the Place of

Concord; the theatre of Pompey; the Odeum, and the Stadium. Though he might

be stupefied by all this, he would remember, too, all that the Republic

had taken from the provinces to construct these wonders, and would say to

himself: "'Tis we who have paid for them." In truth, all the world had

been ransacked to make Rome beautiful. For some time a muffled hostility

had been brewing in provincial hearts against the tyranny of the central

power, especially since it had shewn itself incapable of maintaining peace,

and the Barbarians were threatening the frontiers. Worn out by so many

insurrections, wars, massacres, and pillages, the provinces had come to ask

if the great complicated machine of the Empire was worth all the blood and

money that it cost.

For Augustin, moreover, the crisis was drawing near which was to end in his

return to the Catholic faith. He had been a Christian, and as such brought

up in principles of humility. With these sentiments, he would perhaps

decide that the pride and vanity of the creature at Rome claimed far too

much attention, and was even sacrilegious. It was not only the emperors who

disputed the privileges of immortality with the gods, but anybody who took

it into his head, provided that he was rich or had any kind of notoriety.

Amid the harsh and blinding gilt of palaces and temples, how many statues,

how many inscriptions endeavoured to keep an obscure memory green, or the

features of some unknown man! Of course, at Carthage too, where they copied

Rome, as in all the big cities, there were statues and inscriptions in

abundance upon the Forum, the squares, and in the public baths. But what

had not shocked Augustin in his native land, did shock him in a strange

city. His home-sick eyes opened to faults which till then had been veiled

by usage. In any case, this craze for statues and inscriptions prevailed at

Rome more than anywhere else. The number of statues on the Forum became so

inconvenient, that on many occasions certain ones were marked for felling,

and the more insignificant shifted. The men of stone drove out the living

men, and forced the gods into their temples. And the inscriptions on the

walls bewildered the mind with such a noise of human praise, that ambition

could dream of nothing beyond. It was all a kind of idolatry which revolted

the strict Christians; and in Augustin, even at this time, it must have

offended the candour of a soul which detested exaggeration and bombast.

The vices of the Roman people, with whom he was obliged to live cheek by

jowl, galled him still more painfully. And to begin with, the natives hated

strangers. At the theatres they used to shout: "Down with the foreign

residents!" Acute attacks of xenophobia often caused riots in the city.

Some years before Augustin arrived, a panic about the food supply led to

the expulsion, as useless mouths, of all foreigners domiciled in Rome,

even the professors. Famine was an endemic disease there. And then, these

lazy people were always hungry. The gluttony and drunkenness of the Romans

roused the wonder and also the disgust of the sober races of the Empire--of

the Greeks as well as the Africans. They ate everywhere--in the streets, at

the theatre, at the circus, around the temples. The sight was so ignoble,

and the public intemperance so scandalous, that the Prefect, Ampelius, was

obliged to issue an order prohibiting people who had any self-respect from

eating in the street, the keepers of wine-shops from opening their places

before ten o'clock in the morning, and the hawkers from selling cooked meat

in the streets earlier than a certain hour of the day. But he might as well

have saved himself the trouble. Religion itself encouraged this greediness.

The pagan sacrifices were scarcely more than pretexts for stuffing. Under

Julian, who carried the great public sacrifices of oxen to an abusive

extent, the soldiers got drunk and gorged themselves with meat in the

temples, and came out staggering. Then they would seize hold of any

passers-by, whom they forced to carry them shoulder-high to their barracks.

All this must be kept in mind so as to understand the strictness and

unyielding attitude of the Christian reaction. This Roman people, like the

pagans in general, was frightfully material and sensual. The difficulty of

shaking himself free from matter and the senses is going to be the great

obstacle which delays Augustin's conversion; and if it was so with him, a

fastidious and intellectual man, what about the crowd? Those people thought

of nothing but eating and drinking and lewdness. When they left the tavern

or their squalid rooms, they had only the obscenities of mimes, or the

tumbles of the drivers in the circus, or the butcheries in the amphitheatre

to elevate them. They passed the night there under the awnings provided by

the municipality. Their passion for horse-races and actors and actresses,

curbed though it was by the Christian emperors, continued even after

the sack of Rome by the Barbarians. At the time of the famine, when the

strangers were expelled, they excepted from this wholesale banishment three

thousand female dancers with the members of their choirs, and their leaders

of orchestra.

The aristocracy did not manifest tastes much superior. Save a few

cultivated minds, sincerely fond of literature, the greatest number only

saw in the literary pose an easy way of being fashionable. These became

infatuated about an unknown author, or an ancient author whose books were

not to be had. They had these books sought for and beautifully copied.

They, "who hated study like poison," spoke only of their favourite author:

the others did not exist for them. As a matter of fact, music had ousted

literature: "the libraries were closed like sepulchres." But fashionable

people were interested in an hydraulic organ, and they ordered from the

lute-makers "lyres the size of chariots." Of course, this musical craze was

sheer affectation. Actually, they were only interested in sports: to race,

to arrange races, to breed horses, to train athletes and gladiators. As a

pastime, they collected Oriental stuffs. Silk was then fashionable, and so

were precious stones, enamels, heavy goldsmiths' work. Rows of rings were

worn on each finger. People took the air in silk robes, held together by

brooches carved in the figures of animals, a parasol in one hand, and a fan

with gold fringes in the other. The costumes and fashions of Constantinople

encroached upon the old Rome and the rest of the Western world.

Immense fortunes, which had gathered in the hands of certain people, either

through inheritance or swindling, enabled them to keep up a senseless

expenditure. Like the American millionaires of to-day, who have their

houses and properties in both hemispheres, these great Roman lords

possessed them in every country in the Empire. Symmachus, who was Prefect

of the City when Augustin was in Rome, had considerable estates not only in

Italy and in Sicily, but even in Mauretania. And yet, in spite of all their

wealth and all the privileges they enjoyed, these rich people were neither

happy nor at ease. At the least suspicion of a despotic power, their lives

and property were threatened. Accusations of magic, of disrespect to

the Cæsar, of plots against the Emperor--any pretext was good to plunder

them. During the preceding reign, that of the pitiless Valentinian, the

Roman nobility had been literally decimated by the executioner. A certain

vice-Prefect, Maximinus, had gained a sinister reputation for cleverness in

the art of manufacturing suspects. By his orders, a basket at the end of a

string was hung out from one of the windows of the Prætorium, into which

denunciations might be cast. The basket was in use day and night.

It is clear that at the time that Augustin settled in Rome this abominable

system was a little moderated. But accusation by detectives was always in

the air. And living in this atmosphere of mistrust, hypocrisy, bribery, and

cruelty--small wonder if the Carthaginian fell into bitter reflections upon

Roman corruption. However impressive from the front, the Empire was not

nice to look at close at hand.

But Augustin was, above all, home-sick. When he strolled tinder the shady

trees of the Janiculum or Sallust's gardens, he already said to himself

what he would repeat later to his listeners at Hippo: "Take an African, put

him in a place cool and green, and he won't stay there. He will feel he

must go away and come back to his blazing desert." As for himself, he had

something better to regret than a blazing desert. In front of the City of

Gold, stretched out at his feet, and the horizon of the Sabine Hills, he

remembered the feminine softness of the twilights upon the Lake of Tunis,

the enchantment of moonlit nights upon the Gulf of Carthage, and that

astonishing landscape to be discovered from the height of the terrace of

Byrsa, which all the grandeur of the Roman \_campagna\_ could not make him

forget.

II

THE FINAL DISILLUSION

'The new professor had managed to secure a certain number of pupils whom

he gathered together in his rooms. He could make enough to live at Rome

by himself, if he could not support there the woman and child he had left

behind at Carthage. In this matter of finding work, his host and his

Manichee friends had done him some very good turns. Although forced to

conceal their beliefs since the edict of Theodosius, there were a good many

Manichees in the city. They formed an occult Church, strongly organized,

and its adepts had relations with all classes of Roman society. Possibly

Augustin presented himself as one driven out of Africa by the persecution.

Some compensation would be owing to this young man who had suffered for the

good cause.

It was his friend Alypius, "the brother of his heart," who, having preceded

him to Rome to study law at his parents' wishes, now was the most useful in

helping Augustin to make himself known and find pupils. Himself a Manichee,

converted by Augustin, and a member of one of the leading families in

Thagaste, he had not long to wait for an important appointment in the

Imperial administration. He was assessor to the Treasurer-General, or

"Count of the Italian Bounty Office," and decided fiscal questions. Thanks

to his influence, as well as to his acquaintances among the Manichees, he

was a valuable friend for the new arrival, a friend who could aid him, not

only with his purse, but with advice. Without much capacity for theorizing,

this Alypius was a practical spirit, a straight and essentially honest

soul, whose influence was excellent for his impetuous friend. Of very

chaste habits, he urged Augustin to restraint. And even in abstract

studies, the religious controversies which Augustin dragged him into, his

strong good sense moderated the imaginative dashes, the overmuch subtilty

which sometimes led the other beyond healthy reason.

Unhappily they were both very busy--the judge and the rhetorician--and

although their friendship became still greater during this stay in Rome,

they were not able to see each other as much as they desired. Their

pleasures, too, were perhaps not the same. Augustin did not in the least

care about being chaste, and Alypius had a passion for the amphitheatre--a

passion which his friend disapproved of. Some time earlier, at Carthage,

Augustin had filled him with disgust of the circus. But hardly was Alypius

arrived in Rome, than he became mad about the gladiatorial shows. Some

fellow-students took him to the amphitheatre, almost by force. Thereupon,

he said that he would stay, since they had dragged him there; but he bet

that he would keep his eyes shut all through the fight, and that nothing

could make him open them. He sat down on the benches with those who had

brought him, his eyelids pressed down, refusing to look. Suddenly there was

a roar of shouting, the shout of the crowd hailing the fall of the first

wounded. His lids parted of themselves; he saw the flow of blood. "At the

sight of the blood" says Augustin, "he drank in ruthlessness; no longer

did he turn away, but fixed his gaze, and he became mad--and he knew no

more.... He was fascinated by the criminal atrocity of this battle, and

drunk with the pleasure of blood."

These breathless phrases of the \_Confessions\_ seem to throb still with the

wild frenzy of the crowd. They convey to us directly the kind of Sadic

excitement which people went to find about the arena. Really, a wholesome

sight for future Christians, for all the souls that the brutality of

pagan customs revolted! The very year that Augustin was at Rome, certain

prisoners of war, Sarmatian soldiers, condemned to kill each other in the

amphitheatre, chose suicide rather than this shameful death. There was in

this something to make him reflect--him and his friends. The fundamental

injustices whereon the ancient world rested--the crushing of the slave

and the conquered, the contempt for human life--these things they touched

with the finger when they looked on at the butcheries in the amphitheatre.

All those whose hearts sickened with disgust and horror before these

slaughter-house scenes, all those who longed for a little more mildness, a

little more justice, were all recruits marked out for the peaceful army of

the Christ.

For Alypius, especially, it was not a bad thing to have known this

blood-drunkenness at first hand: he shall be only the more ashamed when

he falls at the feet of the merciful God. Equally useful was it for him

to have personal experience of the harshness of men's justice; and in the

fulfilment of his duties as a judge to observe its errors and flaws. While

he was a student at Carthage he just escaped being condemned to death upon

a false accusation of theft--the theft of a piece of lead! Already they

were dragging him, if not to the place of capital punishment, at least to

prison, when a chance meeting with a friend of his who was a senator saved

him from the threatening mob. At Rome, while Assessor to the Count of the

Italian Bounty Office, he had to resist an attempt to bribe him, and by

doing so risked losing his appointment, and, no doubt, something worse

too. Official venality and dishonesty were evils so deeply rooted, that

he himself nearly succumbed. He wanted some books copied, and he had the

temptation to get this done at the charge of the Treasury. This peculation

had, in his eyes, a good enough excuse, and it was certain to go

undetected. Nevertheless, when he thought it over he changed his mind, and

virtuously refrained from giving himself a library at the expense of the

State.

Augustin, who relates these anecdotes, draws the same moral from them as

we do, to wit--that for a man who was going to be a bishop and, as such,

administrator and judge, this time spent in the Government service was a

good preparatory school. Most of the other great leaders of this generation

of Christians had also been officials; before ordination, they had been

mixed up in business and politics, and had lived freely the life of their

century. So it was with St. Ambrose, with St. Paulinus of Nola, with

Augustin himself, and Evodius and Alypius, his friends.

And yet, however absorbed in their work the two Africans might be, it

is pretty near certain that intellectual questions took the lead of

all others. This is manifest in Augustin's case at least. He must have

astonished the good Alypius when he got to Rome by acknowledging that he

hardly believed in Manicheeism any longer. And he set forth his doubts

about their masters' cosmogony and physical science, his suspicions

touching the hidden immorality of the sect. As for himself, the

controversies, which were the Manichees' strong point, did not dazzle him

any longer. At Carthage, but lately, he had heard a Catholic, a certain

Helpidius, oppose to them arguments from Scripture, which they were unable

to refute. To make matters worse, the Manichee Bishop of Rome made a bad

impression on him from the very outset. This man, he tells us, was of rough

appearance, without culture or polite manners. Doubtless this unmannerly

peasant, in his reception of the young professor, had not shewn himself

sufficiently alive to his merits, and the professor felt aggrieved.

From then, his keen dialectic and his satirical spirit (Augustin had

formidable powers of ridicule all through his life) were exercised upon

the backs of his fellow-religionists. Provisionally, he had admitted

as indisputable the basic principles of Manicheeism: first of all, the

primordial antagonism of the two substances, the God of Light and the God

of Darkness; then, this other dogma, that particles of that Divine Light,

which had been carried away in a temporary victory of the army of Darkness,

were immersed in certain plants and liquors. Hence, the distinction they

made between clean and unclean food. All those foods were pure which

contained some part of the Divine Light; impure, those which did not. The

purity of food became evident by certain qualities of taste, smell, and

appearance. But now Augustin found a good deal of arbitrariness in these

distinctions, and a good deal of simplicity in the belief that the Divine

Light dwelt in a vegetable. "Are they not ashamed," he said, "to search God

with their palates or with their nose? And if His presence is revealed by

a special brilliancy, by the goodness of the taste or the smell, why allow

that dish and condemn this, which is of equal savour, light, and perfume?

"Yea, why do they look upon the golden melon as come out of God's

treasure-house, and yet will have none of the golden fat of the ham or the

yellow of an egg? Why does the whiteness of lettuce proclaim to them the

Divinity, and the whiteness of cream nothing at all? And why this horror

of meat? For, look you, roast sucking-pig offers us a brilliant colour, an

agreeable smell, and an appetizing taste--sure signs, according to them, of

the Divine Presence."... Once started on this topic, Augustin's vivacity

has no limits. He even drops into jokes which would offend modern

shamefacedness by their Aristophanic breadth.

These arguments, to say the truth, did not shake the foundations of the

doctrine, and if a doctrine must be judged according to its works, the

Manichees might entrench themselves behind their rigid moral rules, and

their conduct. Contrary to the more accommodating Catholicism, they paraded

a puritan intolerance. But Augustin had found out at Carthage that this

austerity was for the most part hypocrisy. At Rome he was thoroughly

enlightened.

The Elect of the religion made a great impression by their fasts and their

abstinence from meat. Now it became clear that these devout personages,

under pious pretexts, literally destroyed themselves by over-eating and

indigestion. They held, in fact, that the chief work of piety consisted in

setting free particles of the Divine Light, imprisoned in matter by the

wiles of the God of Darkness. They being the Pure, they purified matter by

absorbing it into their bodies. The faithful brought them stores of fruit

and vegetables, served them with real feasts, so that by eating these

things they might liberate a little of the Divine Substance. Of course,

they abstained from all flesh, flesh being the dwelling-place of the Dark

God, and also from fermented wine, which they called "the devil's gall."

But how they made up for it over the rest! Augustin makes great fun of

these people who would think it a sin if they took as a full meal a small

bit of bacon and cabbage, with two or three mouthfuls of undiluted wine,

and yet ordered to be served up, from three o'clock in the afternoon, all

kinds of fruit and vegetables, the most exquisite too, rendered piquant

by spices, the Manichees holding that spices were very full of fiery and

luminous principles. Then, their palates titillating from pepper, they

swallowed large draughts of mulled wine or wine and honey, and the juice

of oranges, lemons, and grapes. And these junketings began over again at

nightfall. They had a preference for certain cakes, and especially for

truffles and mushrooms--vegetables more particularly mystic.

Such a diet put human gluttony to a heavy test. Many a scandal came to

light in the Roman community. The Elect made themselves sick by devouring

the prodigious quantity of good cheer brought to them with a view to

purification. As it was a sacrilege to let any be lost, the unhappy people

forced themselves to get down the lot. There were even victims: children,

gorged with delicacies, died of stuffing. For children, being innocent

things, were deemed to have quite special purifying virtues.

Augustin was beginning to get indignant at all this nonsense. Still, except

for these extravagances, he continued to believe in the asceticism of the

Elect--asceticism of such severity that the main part of the faithful found

it impossible to practise. And see! just at this moment, whom should he

discover very strange things about but Bishop Faustus, that Faustus whom he

had looked for at Carthage as a Messiah. The holy man, while he preached

renunciation, granted himself a good many indulgences: he lay, for one

thing, on feathers, or upon soft goatskin rugs. And these puritans were not

even honest. The Manichee Bishop of Rome, that man of rough manners who had

so offended Augustin, was on the point of being convicted of stealing the

general cash-box. Lastly, there were rumours in the air, accusing the Elect

of giving themselves over to reprehensible practices in their private

meetings. They condemned marriage and child-bearing as works of the devil,

but they authorized fornication, and even, it is said, certain acts against

nature. That, for Augustin, was the final disillusion.

In spite of it, he did not separate openly from the sect. He kept his

rank of \_auditor\_ in the Manichee Church. What held him to it, were some

plausible considerations on the intellectual side. Manicheeism, with its

distinction of two Principles, accounted conveniently for the problem of

evil and human responsibility. Neither God nor man was answerable for sin

and pain, since it was the other, the Dark Principle, who distributed

them through the world among men. Augustin, who continued to sin,

continued likewise to be very comfortable with such a system of morals and

metaphysics. Besides, he was not one of those convinced, downright minds

who feel the need to quarrel noisily with what they take to be error.

No one has opposed heresies more powerfully, and with a more tireless

patience, than he has. But he always put some consideration into the

business. He knew by experience how easy it is to fall into error, and he

said this charitably to those whom he wished to persuade. There was nothing

about him like St. Jerome.

Personal reasons, moreover, obliged him not to break with his

fellow-religionists who had supported him, nursed him even, on his arrival

at Rome, and who, as we shall see in a moment, might still do him services.

Augustin was not, like his friend Alypius, a practical mind, but he had

tact, and in spite of all the impulsiveness and mettle of his nature,

a certain suppleness which enabled him to manoeuvre without too many

collisions in the midst of the most embarrassing conjunctures. Through

instinctive prudence he prolonged his indecision. Little by little, he who

had formerly flung himself so enthusiastically in pursuit of Truth, glided

into scepticism--the scepticism of the Academics in its usual form.

And at the same time that he lost his taste for speculative thinking, new

annoyances in his profession put the finishing touch on his discouragement.

If the Roman students were less noisy than those of Carthage, they had a

deplorable habit of walking off and leaving their masters unpaid. Augustin

was ere long victimized in this way: he lost his time and his words. As at

Carthage, so at Rome, he had to face the fact that he could not live by his

profession. What was he to do? Would he have to go back home? He had fallen

into despair, when an unforeseen chance turned up for him.

The town council of Milan threw open a professorship of Rhetoric to public

competition. It would be salvation for him if he could get appointed. For

a long time he had wanted a post in the State education. In receipt of a

fixed salary, he would no longer have to worry about beating up a class,

or to guard against the dishonesty of his pupils. He put his name down

immediately among the candidates. But no more in those days than in ours

was simple merit by itself enough. It was necessary to pull strings. His

friends the Manichees undertook to do this for him. They urged his claims

warmly on the Prefect Symmachus, who doubtless presided at the competitive

trials. By an amusing irony of fate, Augustin owed his place to people he

was getting ready to separate from, whom even he was soon going to attack,

and also to a man who was in a way the official enemy of Christianity.

The pagan Symmachus appointing to an important post a future Catholic

bishop--there is matter for surprise in that! But Symmachus, who had been

Proconsul at Carthage, protected the Africans in Rome. Furthermore, it

is likely that the Manichees represented their candidate to him as a man

hostile to Catholics. Now in this year, A.D. 384, the Prefect had just

begun an open struggle with the Catholics. He believed, therefore, that he

made a good choice in appointing Augustin.

So a chain of events, with which his will had hardly anything to do,

was going to draw the young rhetorician to Milan--yes, and how much

farther!--to where he did not want to go, to where the prayers of Monnica

summoned him unceasingly: "Where I am, there shall you be also." When he

was leaving Rome, he did not much expect that. What he chiefly thought of

was that he had at last won an independent financial position, and that he

was become an official of some importance. He had a flattering evidence

of this at once: It was at the expense of the city of Milan and in the

Imperial carriages that he travelled through Italy to take up his new post.

III

THE MEETING BETWEEN AMBROSE AND AUGUSTIN

Before he left Rome, and during his journey to Milan, Augustin must have

recalled more than once the verses of Terence which his friend Marcianus

had quoted by way of encouragement and advice the night he set sail for

Italy:

"This day which brings to thee another life

Demands that thou another man shalt be."

He was thirty years old. The time of youthful wilfulness was over. Age,

disappointments, the difficulties of life, had developed his character.

He was now become a man of position, an eminent official, in a very large

city which was the second capital of the Western Empire and the principal

residence of the Court. If he wished to avoid further set-backs in his

career, it behoved him to choose a line of conduct carefully thought out.

And first of all, it was time to get rid of Manicheeism. A Manichee would

have made a scandal in a city where the greatest part of the population

was Christian, and the Court was Catholic, although it did not conceal

its sympathy with Arianism. It was a long time now since Augustin had

been a Manichee in his heart. Accordingly, he was not obliged to feign

in order to re-enter a Church which already included him formally among

its catechumens. Doubtless he was a very lukewarm catechumen, since at

intervals he inclined to scepticism. But he thought it decent to remain,

at least for the time being, in the Catholic body, in which his mother had

brought him up, until the day when some sure light should arise to direct

his path. Now St. Ambrose was at that time the Catholic Bishop of Milan.

Augustin was very eager to gain his goodwill. Ambrose was an undoubted

political power, an important personage, a celebrated orator whose renown

was shed all across the Roman world. He belonged to an illustrious family.

His father had been Prætorian prefect of Gaul. He himself, with the

title of Consul, was governing the provinces of Emilia and Liguria when

the Milanese forced him, much against his will, to become their bishop.

Baptized, ordained priest, and consecrated, one on top of the other, it

was only apparently that he gave up his civil functions. From the height

of his episcopal throne he always personified the highest authority in the

country.

As soon as he arrived at Milan, Augustin hurried to call upon his bishop.

Knowing him as we do, he must have approached Ambrose in a great transport

of enthusiasm. His imagination, too, was kindled. In his thought this was

a man of letters, an orator, a famous writer, almost a fellow-worker, that

he was going to see. The young professor admired in Bishop Ambrose all the

glory that he was ambitious of, and all that he already believed himself

to be. He fancied, that however great might be the difference in their

positions, he would find himself at once on an equal footing with this high

personage, and would have a familiar talk with him, as he used to have at

Carthage with the Proconsul Vindicianus. He told himself also that Ambrose

was a priest, that is to say, a doctor of souls: he meant to open to him

all his spiritual wretchedness, the anguish of his mind and heart. He

expected consolation from him, if not cure.

Well, he was mistaken. Although in all his writings he speaks of "the holy

Bishop of Milan" with feelings of sincere respect and admiration, he lets

it be understood that his expectations were not realized. If the Manichean

bishop of Rome had offended him by his rough manners, Ambrose disconcerted

him alike by his politeness, his kindliness, and by the reserve,

perhaps involuntarily haughty, of his reception. "He received me," says

Augustin, "like a father, and as a bishop he was pleased enough at my

coming:"--\_peregrinationem meam satis episcopaliter dilexit\_. This \_satis

episcopaliter\_ looks very like a sly banter at the expense of the saint. It

is infinitely probable that St. Ambrose received Augustin, not exactly as a

man of no account, but still, as a sheep of his flock, and not as a gifted

orator, and that, in short, he shewed him the same "episcopal" benevolence

as he had from a sense of duty for all his hearers. It is possible too

that Ambrose was on his guard from the outset with this African, appointed

a municipal professor through the good offices of the pagan Symmachus,

his personal enemy. In the opinion of the Italian Catholics, nothing

good came from Carthage: these Carthaginians were generally Manichees

or Donatists--sectaries the more dangerous because they claimed to be

orthodox, and, mingling with the faithful, hypocritically contaminated

them. And then Ambrose, the great lord, the former Governor of Liguria, the

counsellor of the Emperors, may not have quite concealed a certain ironic

commiseration for this "dealer in words," this young rhetorician who was

still puffed up with his own importance.

Be this as it will, it was a lesson in humility that St. Ambrose, without

intending it, gave to Augustin. The lesson was not understood. The rhetoric

professor gathered only one thing from the visit, which was, that the

Bishop of Milan had received him well. And as human vanity immediately

lends vast significance to the least advances of distinguished or powerful

persons, Augustin felt thankful for it. He began to love Ambrose almost as

much as he admired him, and he admired him for reasons altogether worldly.

"Ambrose I counted one of the happy ones of this world, because he was held

in such honour by the great." The qualification which immediately follows

shews naively enough the sensual Augustin's state of mind at that time:

"Only it seemed to me that celibacy must be a heavy burthen upon him."

In those years the Bishop of Milan might, indeed, pass for a happy man

in the eyes of the world. He was the friend of the very glorious and

very victorious Theodosius; he had been the adviser of the young Emperor

Gratian, but lately assassinated; and although the Empress Justina, devoted

to the Arians, plotted against him, he had still great influence in the

council of Valentinian II--a little Emperor thirteen years old, whom a

Court of pagans and Arians endeavoured to draw into an anti-Catholic

reaction.

Almost as soon as Augustin arrived in Milan, he was able to see for himself

the great authority and esteem which Ambrose possessed, the occasion being

a dispute which made a great noise.

Two years earlier, Gratian had had the statue and altar of \_Victory\_

removed from the \_Curia\_, declaring that this pagan emblem and its

accompaniments no longer served any purpose in an assembly of which the

majority was Christian. By the same stroke, he suppressed the incomes of

the sacerdotal colleges with all their privileges, particularly those of

the Vestals; confiscated for the revenue the sums granted for the exercise

of religion; seized the property of the temples; and forbade the priests

to receive bequests of real estate. This meant the complete separation

of the State and the ancient religion. The pagan minority in the Senate,

with Symmachus, the Prefect, at its head, protested against this edict.

A deputation was sent to Milan to place the pagan grievances before

the Emperor. Gratian refused to receive them. It was thought that his

successor, Valentinian II, being feebler, would be more obliging. A new

senatorial committee presented themselves with a petition drawn up by

Symmachus--a genuine piece of oratory which Ambrose himself admired, or

pretended to admire. This speech made a deep impression when it was read

in the Imperial Council. But Ambrose intervened with all his eloquence.

He demanded that the common law should be applied equally to pagans as to

Christians, and it was he who won the day. \_Victory\_ was not replaced in

the Roman \_Curia\_, neither were the goods of the temples returned.

Augustin must have been very much struck by this advantage which

Catholicism had gained. It became clear that henceforth this was to be

the State religion. And he who envied so much the fortunate of the world,

might take note, besides, that the new religion brought, along with the

faith, riches and honours to its adepts. At Rome he had listened to the

disparaging by pagans and his Manichee friends of the popes and their

clergy. They made fun of the fashionable clerics and legacy hunters. It was

related that the Roman Pontiff, servant of the God of the poor, maintained

a gorgeous establishment, and that his table rivalled the Imperial table in

luxury. The prefect Prætextatus, a resolute pagan, said scoffingly to Pope

Damasus: "Make me Bishop of Rome, and I'll become a Christian at once."

Certainly, commonplace human reasons can neither bring about nor account

for a sincere conversion. Conversion is a divine work. But human reasons,

arranged by a mysterious Will with regard to this work, may at least

prepare a soul for it. Anyhow, it cannot be neglected that Augustin, coming

to Milan full of ambitious plans, there saw Catholicism treated with so

much importance in the person of Ambrose. This religion, which till then he

had despised, now appeared to him as a triumphant religion worth serving.

But though such considerations might attract Augustin's attention, they

took no hold on his conscience. It was well enough for an intriguer about

the Court to get converted from self-interest. As for him, he wanted all or

nothing; the chief good in his eyes was certainty and truth. He scarcely

believed in this any longer, and surely had no hope of finding it among

the Catholics; but still he went to hear Ambrose's sermons. He went in the

first place as a critic of language, with the rather jealous curiosity of

the trained man who watches how another man does it. He wanted to judge

himself if the sacred orator was as good as his reputation. The firm and

substantial eloquence of this former official, this statesman who was more

than anything a man of action, immediately got control of the frivolous

rhetorician. To be sure, he did not find in Ambrose's sermons the

exhilaration or the verbal caress which had captivated him in those of

Faustus the Manichean; but yet they had a persuasive grace which held him.

Augustin heard the bishop with pleasure. Still, if he liked to hear him

talk, he remained contemptuous of the doctrine he preached.

Then, little by little, this doctrine forced itself on his meditations:

he perceived that it was more serious than he had thought hitherto, or,

at least, that it could be defended. Ambrose had started in Italy the

exegetical methods of the Orientals. He discovered in Scripture allegorical

meanings, sometimes edifying, sometimes deep, always satisfying for a

reasonable mind. Augustin, who was inclined to subtilty, much relished

these explanations which, if ingenious, were often forced. The Bible

no longer seemed to him so absurd. Finally, the immoralities which the

Manichees made such a great point of against the Holy Writ, were justified,

according to Ambrose, by historical considerations: what God did not allow

to-day, He allowed formerly by reason of the conditions of existence.

However, though the Bible might be neither absurd nor contrary to morals,

this did not prove that it was true. Augustin found no outlet for his

doubts.

He would have been glad to have Ambrose help him to get rid of them. Many a

time he tried to have a talk with him about these things. But the Bishop of

Milan was so very busy a personage! "I could not ask him," says Augustin,

"what I wanted as I wanted, because the shoals of busy people who consulted

him about their affairs, and to whose infirmities he ministered, came

between me and his ear and lips. And in the few moments when he was not

thus surrounded, he was refreshing either his body with needful food, or

his mind with reading. While he read his eye wandered along the page and

his heart searched out the meaning, but his voice and his tongue were at

rest. Often when we attended (for the door was open to all, and no one was

announced), we saw him reading silently, but never otherwise, and after

sitting for some time without speaking (\_for who would presume to trouble

one so occupied?\_) we went away again. We divined that, for the little

space of time which was all that he could secure for the refreshment of his

mind, he allowed himself a holiday from the distraction of other people's

business, and did not wish to be interrupted; \_and perhaps he was afraid

lest eager listeners should invite him to explain the harder passages of

his author, or to enter upon the discussion of difficult topics\_, and

hinder him from perusing as many volumes as he wished.... \_Of course

the reason that guided a man of such remarkable virtue must have been

good....\_"

Nobody could comment more subtly--nor, be it said also, more

maliciously--the attitude of St. Ambrose towards Augustin, than Augustin

himself does it here. At the time he wrote this page, the events he was

relating had happened a long time ago. But he is a Christian, and, in his

turn, he is a bishop: he understands now what he could not understand

then. He feels thoroughly at heart that if Ambrose withdrew himself, it

was because the professor of rhetoric was not in a state of mind to have a

profitable discussion with a believer: he lacked the necessary humility of

heart and intellect. But at the moment, he must have taken things in quite

another way, and have felt rather hurt, not to say more, at the bishop's

apparent indifference.

Just picture a young writer of to-day, pretty well convinced of his value,

but uneasy about his future, coming to ask advice of an older man already

famous--well, Augustin's advances to Ambrose were not unlike that, save

that they had a much more serious character, since it was not a question of

literature, but of the salvation of a soul. At this period, what Augustin

saw in Ambrose, even when he consulted him on sacred matters, was chiefly

the orator, that is to say, a rather older rival.... He enters. He is shewn

into the private room of the great man, without being announced, \_like any

ordinary person\_. The great man does not lay aside his book to greet him,

does not even speak a word to him.... What would the official professor of

Rhetoric to the City of Milan think of such a reception? One can make out

clearly enough through the lines of the \_Confessions\_. He said to himself

that Ambrose, being a bishop, had charge of souls, and he was surprised

that the bishop, no matter how great a lord he might be, made no attempt

whatever to offer him spiritual aid. And as he was still devoid of

Christian charity, no doubt he thought too that Ambrose was conscious

that he had not the ability to wrestle with a dialectician of Augustin's

strength, and that, into the bargain, the prelate was to seek in knowledge

of the Scriptures. And, in truth, Ambrose had been made a bishop so

suddenly that he must have found himself obliged to improvise a hasty

knowledge. Anyhow, Augustin concluded that if he refused to discuss, it was

because he was afraid of being at a disadvantage.

Very surely St. Ambrose had no notion of what the catechumen was thinking.

He soared too high to trouble about miserable stings to self-respect. In

his ministry he was for all alike, and he would have thought it against

Christian equality to shew any special favour to Augustin. If, in the brief

talks he had with the young rhetorician, he was able to gather anything of

his character, he could not have formed a very favourable opinion of it.

The high-strung temperament of the African, these vague yearnings of the

spirit, these sterile melancholies, this continual temporizing before the

faith--all that could only displease Ambrose, the practical Roman, the

official used all his life to command.

However that was, Augustin, in following years, never allowed himself the

least reproach towards Ambrose. On the contrary, everywhere he loads him

with praise, quotes him repeatedly in his treatises, and takes refuge on

his authority. He calls him his "father." But once, when he is speaking

of the spiritual desolation in which he was plunged at Milan, there does

escape him something like a veiled complaint which appears to be aimed at

Ambrose. After recalling the eagerness with which he sought truth in those

days, he adds: "If any one could have been found then to trouble about

instructing me, he would have had a most willing and docile pupil."

This phrase, in such marked contrast with so many laudatory passages in

the \_Confessions\_ about St. Ambrose, seems to be indeed a statement of

the plain truth. If God made use of Ambrose to convert Augustin, it is

nevertheless likely that Ambrose personally did nothing, or very little, to

bring about this conversion.

IV

PLANS OF MARRIAGE

But even as he draws nearer the goal, Augustin would appear, on the

contrary, to get farther away from it. Such are God's secret paces, Who

snatches souls like a thief: He drops on them without warning. Till the

very eve of the day when Christ shall come to take him, Augustin will be

all taken up with the world and the care of making a good figure in it.

Although Ambrose's sermons stimulated him to reflect upon the great

historical reality which Christianity is, he had as yet but dim glimpses

of it. He had given up his superficial unbelief, and yet did not believe

in anything definite. He drifted into a sort of agnosticism compounded of

mental indolence and discouragement. When he scrutinized his conscience to

the depths, the most he could find was a belief in the existence of God and

His providence--quite abstract ideas which he was incapable of enlivening.

But whatever was the use of speculating upon Truth and the Sovereign Good!

The main thing to do was to live.

Now that his future was certain, Augustin endeavoured to arrange his life

with a view to his tranquillity. He had no longer very large ambitions.

What he principally wanted to do was to create for himself a nice little

existence, peaceful and agreeable, one might almost say, middle-class. His

present fortune, although small, was still enough for that, and he was in a

hurry to enjoy it.

Accordingly, he had not been long in Milan ere he sent for his mistress and

his son. He had rented an apartment in a house which gave on a garden. The

owner, who did not live there, allowed him the use of the whole house. A

house, the dream of the sage! And a garden in Virgil's country! Augustin,

the professor, should have been wonderfully happy. His mother soon joined

him. Gradually a whole tribe of Africans came down on him, and took

advantage of his hospitality. Here was his brother, Navigius, his two

cousins, Rusticus and Lastidianus, his friend Alypius, who could not make

up his mind to part from him, and probably Nebridius, another of his

Carthage friends. Nothing could be more in harmony with the customs of the

time. The Rhetorician to the City of Milan had a post which would pass

for superb in the eyes of his poor relations. He was acquainted with very

important people, and had access to the Imperial Court, whence favours and

bounties came. Immediately, the family ran to put themselves under his

protection and be enrolled beneficiaries, to get what they could out of

his new fortune and credit. And then these immigrations of Africans and

Orientals into the northern countries always come about in the same way. It

is enough if one of them gets on there: he becomes immediately the drop of

ink on the blotting-paper.

The most important person in this little African phalanstery was

unquestionably Monnica, who had taken in hand the moral and material

control of the house. She was not very old--not quite fifty-four--but she

wanted to be in her own country. That she should have left it, and faced

the weariness of a long journey over sea and land, she must have had very

serious reasons. The poverty into which she had fallen since the death of

her husband would not be an adequate explanation of her departure from

her native land. She had still some small property at Thagaste; she could

have lived there. The true motives of her departure were of an altogether

different order. First of all, she passionately loved her son, to the point

that she was not able to live away from him. Let us recall Augustin's

touching words: "For she loved to keep me with her, as mothers are wont,

yes, far more than most mothers." Besides that, she wanted to save him. She

completely believed that this was her work in the world.

Beginning from now, she is no longer the widow of Patricius: she is already

Saint Monnica. Living like a nun, she fasted, prayed, mortified her body.

By long meditating on the Scriptures, she had developed within her the

sense of spiritual realities, so that before long she astonished Augustin

himself. She had visions; perhaps she had trances. As she came over the sea

from Carthage to Ostia, the ship which carried her ran into a wild gale.

The danger became extreme, and the sailors themselves could no longer hide

their fear. But Monnica intrepidly encouraged them. "Never you fear, we

shall arrive in port safe and sound!" God, she declared, had promised her

this.

If, in her Christian life, she knew other minutes more divine, that was

truly the most heroic. Across Augustin's calm narrative, we witness the

scene. This woman lying on the deck among passengers half dead from fatigue

and terror, suddenly flings back her veils, stands up before the maddened

sea, and with a sudden flame gleaming over her pale face, she cries to the

sailors: "What do you fear? We shall get to port. \_I am sure of it!\_" The

glorious act of faith!

At this solemn moment, when she saw death so near, she had a clear

revelation of her destiny; she knew with absolute certainty that she was

entrusted with a message for her son, and that her son would receive this

message, in spite of all, in spite of the wildness of the sea--aye, in

spite of his own heart.

When this sublime emotion had subsided, it left with her the conviction

that sooner or later Augustin would change his ways. He had lost himself,

he was mistaken about himself. This business of rhetorician was unworthy

of him. The Master of the field had chosen him to be one of the great

reapers in the time of harvest. For a long while Monnica had foreseen the

exceptional place that Augustin was to take in the Church. Why fritter

away his talent and intelligence in selling vain words, when there were

heresies to combat, the Truth to make shine forth, when the Donatists were

capturing the African basilicas from the Catholics? What, in fact, was the

most celebrated rhetorician compared to a bishop--protector of cities,

counsellor of emperors, representative of God on earth? All this might

Augustin be. And he remained stubborn in his error! Prayers and efforts

must be redoubled to draw him from that. It was also for herself that she

struggled, for the dearest of her hopes as a mother. To bear a soul to

Jesus Christ--and a chosen soul who would save in his turn souls without

number--for this only had she lived. And so it was that on the deck, tired

by the rolling of the ship, drenched by the seas that were breaking on

board, and hardly able to stand in the teeth of the wind, she cried out to

the sailors: "What do you fear? We shall get to port. I am sure of it...."

At Milan she was regarded by Bishop Ambrose as a model parishioner. She

never missed his sermons and "hung upon his lips as a fountain of water

springing up to eternal life." And yet it does not appear that the great

bishop understood the mother any better than he did the son: he had not

the time. For him Monnica was a worthy African woman, perhaps a little odd

in her devotion, and given to many a superstitious practice. Thus, she

continued to carry baskets of bread and wine and pulse to the tombs of the

martyrs, according to the use at Carthage and Thagaste. When, carrying

her basket, she came to the door of one of the Milanese basilicas, the

doorkeeper forbade her to enter, saying that it was against the bishop's

orders, who had solemnly condemned such practices because they smacked

of idolatry. The moment she learned that this custom was prohibited by

Ambrose, Monnica, very much mortified, submitted to take away her basket,

for in her eyes Ambrose was the providential apostle who would lead her son

to salvation. And yet it must have grieved her to give up this old custom

of her country. Save for the fear of displeasing the bishop, she would

have kept it up. Ambrose was gratified by her obedience, her fervour and

charity. When by chance he met the son, he congratulated him on having such

a mother. Augustin, who did not yet despise human praise, no doubt expected

that Ambrose would in turn pay some compliments to himself. But Ambrose did

not praise him at all, and perhaps he felt rather vexed.

He himself, however, was always very busy; he had hardly any time to profit

by the pious exhortations of the bishop. His day was filled by his work

and his social duties. In the morning he lectured. The afternoon went in

friendly visits, or in looking up men of position whom he applied to for

himself or his relations. In the evening, he prepared to-morrow's lecture.

In spite of this very full and stirring life, which would seem to satisfy

all his ambitions, he could not manage to stifle the cry of his heart in

distress. He did not feel really happy. In the first place, it is doubtful

whether he liked Milan any better than Rome. He felt the cold there very

much. The Milanese winters are very trying, especially for a southerner.

Thick fogs rise from the canals and the marsh lands which surround the

city. The Alpine snows are very near. This climate, damper and frostier

even than at Rome, did no good to his chest. He suffered continually from

hoarseness; he was obliged to interrupt his lectures--a most disastrous

necessity for a man whose business it is to talk. These attacks became so

frequent that he was forced to wonder if he could keep on long in this

state. Already he felt that he might be obliged to give up his profession.

Then, in those hours when he lost heart, he flung to the winds all his

youthful ambitions. As a last resort, the voiceless rhetorician would take

a post in one of the administrative departments of the Empire. The idea of

being one day a provincial governor did not rouse any special repugnance.

What a fall for him! "Yes, but it is the wisest, the wisest thing,"

retorted the ill-advising voice, the one we are tempted to listen to when

we doubt ourselves.

Friendship, as always with Augustin, consoled him for his hopeless

thoughts. Near him was "the brother of his heart," the faithful Alypius,

and also Nebridius, that young man so fond of metaphysical discussions.

Nebridius had left his rich estate in the Carthaginian suburbs, and a

mother who loved him, simply to live with Augustin in the pursuit of truth.

Romanianus was also there, but for a less disinterested reason. The Mæcenas

of Thagaste, after his ostentatious expenditure, found that his fortune

was threatened. A powerful enemy, who had started a law-suit against him,

worked to bring about his downfall. Romanianus had come to Milan to

defend himself before the Emperor, and to win the support of influential

personages about the Court. And so it came about that he saw a great deal

of Augustin.

Besides this little band of fellow-countrymen, the professor of rhetoric

had some very distinguished friends among the aristocracy. He was

especially intimate with that Manlius Theodorus whom the poet Claudian

celebrates, and to whom he himself later on was to dedicate one of his

books. This rich man, who had been Proconsul at Carthage, where no doubt he

had met Augustin, lived at this time retired in the country, dividing his

leisure hours between the study of the Greek philosophers, especially of

the Platonists, and the cultivation of his vineyards and olive trees.

Here, as at Thagaste, in these beautiful villas on the shores of the

Italian lakes, the son of Monnica gave himself up once more to the

sweetness of life. "I liked an easy life," he avows in all simplicity.

He felt himself to be more Epicurean than ever. He might have chosen

Epicureanism altogether, if he had not always kept a fear of what is beyond

life. But when he was the guest of Manlius Theodoras, fronting the dim blue

mountains of lake Como, framed in the high windows of the \_triclinium\_,

he did not think much about what is beyond life. He said to himself: "Why

desire the impossible? So very little is needed to satisfy a human soul."

The enervating contact of luxury and comfort imperceptibly corrupted him.

He became like those fashionable people whom he knew so well how to charm

with his talk. Like the fashionable people of all times, these designated

victims of the Barbarians built, with their small daily pleasures, a

rampart against all offensive or saddening realities, leaving the important

questions without answer, no longer even asking them. And they said:

"I have beautiful books, a well-heated house, well-trained slaves, a

delightfully arranged bathroom, a comfortable vehicle: life is sweet. I

don't wish for a better. What's the use? This one is good enough for me."

At the moment when his tired intellect gave up everything, Augustin was

taken in the snare of easy enjoyment, and desired to resemble these people

at all points, to be one of them. But to be one of them he must have a

higher post than a rhetorician's, and chiefly it would be necessary to put

all the outside forms and exterior respectability into his life that the

world of fashion shews. Thus, little by little, he began to think seriously

of marriage.

His mistress was the only obstacle in the way of this plan. He got rid of

her.

That was a real domestic drama, which he has tried to hide; but it must

have been extremely painful for him, to judge by the laments which he gives

vent to, despite himself, in some phrases, very brief and, as it were,

ashamed. In this drama Monnica was certainly the leader, though it is

likely that Augustin's friends also played their parts. No doubt, they

objected to the professor of rhetoric, that he was injuring his reputation

as well as his future by living thus publicly with a concubine. But

Monnica's reasons were more forcible and of quite another value.

To begin with, it is very natural that she should have suffered in her

maternal dignity, as well as in her conscience as a Christian, by having to

put up with the company of a stranger who was her son's mistress. However

large we may suppose the house where the African tribe dwelt, a certain

clashing between the guests was unavoidable. Generally, disputes as to

who shall direct the domestic arrangements divide mother-in-law and

daughter-in-law who live under one roof. What could be Monnica's feelings

towards a woman who was not even a daughter-in-law and was regarded by her

as an intruder? She did not consider it worth while to make any attempt at

regulating the entanglement of her son by marrying them: this person was

of far too low a class. It is all very well to be a saint, but one does

not forget that one is the widow of a man of curial rank, and that a

middle-class family with self-respect does not lower itself by admitting

the first-comer into its ranks by marriage. But these were secondary

considerations in her eyes. The only one which could have really preyed on

her mind is that this woman delayed Augustin's conversion. On account of

her, as Monnica saw plainly, he put off his baptism indefinitely. She was

the chain of sin, the unclean past under whose weight he stifled. He must

be freed from her as soon as possible.

Convinced therefore that such was her bounden duty, she worked continually

to make him break off. By way of putting him in some sort face to face with

a deed impossible to undo, she searched to find him a wife, with the fine

eagerness that mothers usually put into this kind of hunt. She discovered

a girl who filled, as they say, all the requirements, and who realized all

the hopes of Augustin. She had a fortune considerable enough not to be a

burthen on her husband. Her money, added to the professor's salary, would

allow the pair to live in ease and comfort. So they were betrothed. In

the uncertainty about all things which was Augustin's state just then, he

allowed his mother to work at this marriage. No doubt he approved, and like

a good official he thought it was time for him to settle down.

From that moment, the separation became inevitable. How did the poor

creature who had been faithful to him during so many years feel at this

ignominious dismissal? What must have been the parting between the child

Adeodatus and his mother? How, indeed, could Augustin consent to take him

from her? Here, again, he has decided to keep silent on this painful drama,

from a feeling of shame easy to understand. Of course, he was no longer

strongly in love with his mistress, but he was attached to her by some

remains of tenderness, and by that very strong tie of pleasure shared. He

has said it in words burning with regret. "When they took from my side, as

an obstacle to my marriage, her with whom I had been used for such a long

time to sleep, my heart was torn at the place where it was stuck to hers,

and the wound was bleeding." The phrase casts light while it burns. "At the

place where my heart stuck to hers"--\_cor ubi adhærebat\_. He acknowledges

then that the union was no longer complete, since at many points he had

drawn apart. If the soul of his mistress had remained the same, his had

changed: however much he might still love her, he was already far from her.

Be that as it will, she behaved splendidly in the affair--this forsaken

woman, this poor creature whom they deemed unworthy of Augustin. She was a

Christian; perhaps she perceived (for a loving woman might well have this

kind of second-sight) that it was a question not only of the salvation of

a loved being, but of a divine mission to which he was predestined. She

sacrificed herself that Augustin might be an apostle and a saint--a great

servant of God. So she went back to her Africa, and to shew that she

pardoned, if she could not forget, she vowed that she would never know any

other man. "She who had slept" with Augustin could never be the wife of any

one else.

However low she may have been to begin with, the unhappy woman was great at

this crisis. Her nobility of soul humiliated Augustin, and Monnica herself,

and punishment was not slow in falling on them both--on him, for letting

himself be carried away by sordid plans for success in life, and upon her,

the saint, for having been too accommodating. As soon as his mistress was

gone, Augustin suffered from being alone. "I thought that I should be

miserable," says he, "without the embraces of a woman." Now his promised

bride was too young: two years must pass before he could marry her. How

could he control himself till then? Augustin did not hesitate: he found

another mistress.

There was Monnica's punishment, cruelly deceived in her pious intentions.

In vain did she hope a great deal of good from this approaching marriage:

the silence of God shewed her that she was on the wrong track. She begged

for a vision, some sign which would reveal to her how this new-planned

marriage would turn out. Her prayer was not heard.

"Meanwhile," says Augustin, "my sins were being multiplied." But he did

not limit himself to his own sins: he led others into temptation. Even in

matrimonial matters, he felt the need of making proselytes. So he fell upon

the worthy Alypius. He, to be sure, guarded himself chastely from women,

although in the outset of his youth, to be like everybody else, he had

tried pleasure with women; but he had found that it did not suit his taste.

However, Augustin put conjugal delights before him with so much heat, that

he too began to turn his thoughts that way, "not that he was overcome by

the desire of pleasure, \_but out of curiosity\_." For Alypius, marriage

would be a sort of philosophic and sentimental experience.

Here are quite modern expressions to translate very old conditions of soul.

The fact is, that these young men, Augustin's friends and Augustin himself,

were startlingly like those of a generation already left behind, alas! who

will probably keep in history the presumptuous name they gave themselves:

\_The Intellectuals\_.

Like us, these young Latins of Africa, pupils of the rhetoricians and the

pagan philosophers, believed in hardly anything but ideas. All but ready to

affirm that Truth is not to be come at, they thought, just the same, that

a vain hunt after it was a glorious risk to run, or, at the very least, an

exciting game. For them this game made the whole dignity and value of life.

Although they had spasms of worldly ambition, they really despised whatever

was not pure speculation. In their eyes, the world was ugly; action

degrading. They barred themselves within the ideal garden of the sage, "the

philosopher's corner," as they called it, and jealously they stopped up all

the holes through which the painful reality might have crept through to

them. But where they differed from us, is that they had much less dryness

of soul, with every bit as much pedantry--but such ingenuous pedantry!

That's what saved them--their generosity of soul, the youth of their

hearts. They loved each other, and they ended by growing fond of life and

getting in contact with it again. Nebridius journeyed from Carthage to

Milan, abandoning his mother and family, neglecting considerable interests,

not only to talk philosophy with Augustin, but to live with him as a

friend. From this moment they might have been putting in practice those

words of the Psalm, which Augustin ere long will be explaining to his monks

with such tender eloquence: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for

brethren to dwell together in unity!"

This is not baseless hypothesis: they had really a plan for establishing a

kind of lay monastery, where the sole rule would be the search after Truth

and the happy life. There would be about a dozen solitaries. They would

make a common stock of what means they possessed. The richest, and among

these Romanianus, promised to devote their whole fortune to the community.

But the recollection of their wives brought this naive plan to nothing.

They had neglected to ask the opinions of their wives, and if these, as

was likely, should refuse to enter the convents with their husbands, the

married men could not face the scheme of living without them. Augustin

especially, who was on the point of starting a new connection, declared

that he would never find the courage for it. He had also forgotten that

he had many dependents: his whole family lived on him. Could he leave his

mother, his son, his brother, and his cousins?

In company with Alypius and Nebridius, he sincerely lamented that this

fair dream of coenobite life was impracticable. "We were three famishing

mouths," he says, "complaining of our distress one to another, and waiting

upon Thee that Thou mightest give us our meat in due season. And in all

the bitterness that Thy mercy put into our worldly pursuits, we sought the

reason why we suffered; and all was darkness. Then we turned to each other

shuddering, and asked: 'How much longer can this last?'..."

One day, a slight commonplace fact which they happened upon brought home

to them still more cruelly their intellectual poverty. Augustin, in his

official position as municipal orator, had just delivered the official

panegyric of the Emperor. The new year was opening: the whole city was

given over to mirth. And yet he was cast down, knowing well that he had

just uttered many an untruth, and chiefly because he despaired of ever

being happy. His friends were walking with him. Suddenly, as they crossed

the street, they came upon a beggar, quite drunk, who was indulging in the

jolliest pranks. So there was a happy man! A few pence had been enough

to give him perfect felicity, whereas they, the philosophers, despite

the greatest efforts and all their knowledge, could not manage to win

happiness. No doubt, as soon as the drunkard grew sober, he would be more

wretched than before. What matters that, if this poor joy--yes, though it

be an illusion--can so much cheer a poor creature, thus raise him so far

above himself! That minute, at least, he shall have lived in full bliss.

And to Augustin came the temptation to do as the beggar-man, to throw

overboard his philosophical lumber and set himself simply to live without

afterthoughts, since life is sometimes good.

But an instinct, stronger than the instinct of pleasure, said to him:

"\_There is something else!\_--Suppose that were true?--Perhaps you might be

able to find out." This thought tormented him unceasingly. Now eager, now

disheartened, he set about trying to find the "something else."

V

THE CHRIST IN THE GARDEN

"I was tired of devouring time and of being devoured by it." The whole

moral crisis that Augustin is about to undergo might be summed up in these

few words so concentrated and so strong. No more to scatter himself among

the multitude of vain things, no more to let himself flow along with the

minutes as they flowed; but to pull himself together, to escape from the

rout so as to establish himself upon the incorruptible and eternal, to

break the chains of the old slave he continues to be so as to blossom forth

in liberty, in thought, in love--that is the salvation he longs for. If it

be not yet the Christian salvation, he is on the road which leads to that.

One might amuse oneself by drawing a kind of ideal map-route of his

conversion, and fastening into one solid chain the reasons which made him

emerge at the act of faith: he himself perhaps, in his \_Confessions\_,

has given way too much to this inclination. In reality, conversion is an

interior fact, and (let us repeat it) a divine fact, which is independent

of all control by the reason. Before it breaks into light, there is a long

preparation in that dark region of the soul which to-day is called the

subconscious. Now nobody has more \_lived\_ his ideas than did Augustin

at this time of his life. He took them, left them, took them up again,

persisted in his desperate effort. They reflect in their disorder his

variable soul, and the misgivings which troubled it to its depths. And yet

it cannot be that this interior fact should be in violent contradiction

with logic. The head ought not to hinder the heart. With the future

believer, a parallel work goes on in the feelings and in the thought. If we

are not able to reproduce the marches and counter-marches, or follow their

repeatedly broken line, we can at least shew the main halting-places.

Let us recall Augustin's state of mind when he came to Milan. He was a

sceptic, the kind of sceptic who regards as useless all speculation upon

the origin of things, and for whom cognition is but an approximation of the

true. Vaguely deist, he saw in Jesus Christ only a wise man among the wise.

He believed in God and the providences of God, which amounts to this: That

although materialist by tendency, he admitted the divine interference in

human affairs--the miracle. This is an important point which differentiates

him from modern materialists.

Next, he listened to the preaching of Ambrose. The Bible no longer seemed

to him absurd or at variance with a moral scheme. Ambrose's exegesis,

half allegorical, half historic, might be accepted, taken altogether,

by self-respecting minds. But what, above all, struck Augustin in the

Scriptures, was the wisdom, the practical efficiency. Those who lived by

the Christian rule were not only happy people, but, as Pascal would say,

good sons, good husbands, good fathers, good citizens. He began to suspect

that this life here below is bearable and has a meaning only when it is

fastened to the life on high. Even as for nations glory is daily bread, so

for the individual the sacrifice to something which is beyond the world is

the only way of living in the world.

So, little by little, Augustin corrected the false notions that the

Manichees had filled him with about Catholicism. He acknowledged that in

attacking it he had "been barking against the vain imaginations of carnal

thoughts." Still, he found great difficulty in getting free of all his

Manichean prejudices. The problem of Evil remained inexplicable for him,

apart from Manichee teachings. God could not be the author of evil. This

truth admitted, he went on from it to think, against his former masters,

that nothing is bad in itself--bad because it has within it a corrupting

principle. On the contrary, all things are good, though in varying degrees.

The apparent defects of creation, perceived by our senses, blend into

the harmony of the whole. The toad and the viper have their place in the

operation of a perfectly arranged world. But physical ill is not the only

ill; there is also the evil that we do and the evil that others do us.

Crime and pain are terrible arguments against God. Now the Christians

hold that the first is the product solely of the human will, of liberty

corrupted by original sin, and that the other is permitted by God as a

means of purifying souls. Of course, this was a solution, but it implied a

belief in the dogmas of the Fall and of the Redemption. Augustin did not

accept them yet. He was too proud to recognize an impaired will and the

need of a Saviour. "My puffed-out face," he says, "closed up my eyes."

Nevertheless he had taken a great step in rejecting the fundamental dogma

of Manicheeism--the double Principle of good and evil. Henceforth for

Augustin there exists only one Principle, unique and incorruptible--the

Good, which is God. But his view of this divine substance is still

quite materialistic, to such an extent is he governed by his senses. In

his thought, it is corporeal, spatial, and infinite. He pictures it as

a kind of limitless sea, wherein is a huge sponge bathing the world

that it pervades throughout.... He was at this point, when one of his

acquaintances, "a man puffed up with immense vanity," gave him some of

the Dialogues of Plato, translated into Latin by the famous rhetorician

Victorinus Afer. It is worth noting, as we pass, that Augustin, now

thirty-two years old, a rhetorician by profession and a philosopher by

taste, had not yet read Plato. This is yet another proof to what extent the

instruction of the ancients was oral, resembling in this the Mussulmans'

instruction of to-day. Up to now, he had only known Plato by hearsay. He

read him, and it was as a revelation. He learned that a reality could exist

without diffusion through space. He saw God as unextended and yet infinite.

The sense of the divine Soul was given to him. Then the primordial

necessity of the Mediator or Word was borne in upon his mind. It is the

Word which has created the world. It is through the Word that the world,

and God, and all things, including ourselves, become comprehensible to us.

What an astonishment! Plato corresponded with St. John! "In the beginning

was the Word"--\_in principio erat verbum\_--said the fourth Gospel. But

it was not only an Evangelist that Augustin discovered in the Platonist

dialogues, it was almost all the essential part of the doctrine of Christ.

He saw plainly the profound differences, but for the moment he was struck

by the resemblances, and they carried him away. What delighted him, first

of all, is the beauty of the world, constructed after His own likeness by

the Demiurgus. God is Beauty; the world is fair as He who made it. This

metaphysical vision entranced Augustin; his whole heart leaped towards

this ineffably beautiful Divinity. Carried away by enthusiasm he cries: "I

marvelled to find that now I loved Thee, O my God, and not a phantasm in

Thy stead. If I was not yet in a state to enjoy Thee, \_I was swept up to

Thee by Thy beauty\_."

But such an abandonment could not endure: "I was not yet in a state to

enjoy Thee." There is Augustin's main objection to Platonism. He felt

that instead of touching God, of enjoying Him, he would be held by purely

mental conceptions, that he would be always losing his way among the

phantasmagoria of idealism. What was the use of giving up the illusory

realities of the senses, if it were not to get hold of more \_solid\_

realities? Though his intelligence, his poet's imagination, might be

attracted by the glamour of Platonism, his heart was not satisfied. "It is

one thing," he says, "from some wooded height to behold the land of peace,

another thing to march thither along the high road."

St. Paul it was who shewed him this road. He began to read the \_Epistles\_

carefully, and the more he read of them the more he became aware of the

abyss which separates philosophy from wisdom--the one which marshals the

ideas of things, the other which, ignoring ideas, leads right up to the

divine realities whereon the others are suspended. The Apostle taught

Augustin that it was not enough to get a glimpse of God through the crystal

of concepts, but that it is necessary to be united to Him in spirit and in

truth--to possess and enjoy Him. And to unite itself to this Good, the soul

must get itself into a fit state for such a union, purify and cure itself

of all its fleshly maladies, descry its place in the world and hold to it.

Necessity of repentance, of humility, of the contrite and humble heart.

Only the contrite and humble heart shall see God. "The broken heart shall

be cured," says the Scripture, "but the heart of the proud man shall be

shattered." So Augustin, the intellectual, had to change his methods,

and he felt that this change was right. If the writer who wants to write

beautiful things ought to put himself beforehand into some sort of a state

of grace, wherein not only vile actions, but unworthy thoughts become

impossible, the Christian, in like manner, must cleanse and prepare

his inward eye to perceive the divine verities. Augustin grasped this

thought in reading St. Paul. But what, above all, appealed to him in the

\_Epistles\_, was their paternal voice, the mildness and graciousness hidden

beneath the uncultivated roughness of the phrases. He was charmed by this.

How different from the philosophers! "Those celebrated pages have no trace

of the pious soul, the tears of repentance, nor of Thy sacrifice, O my God,

nor of the troubled spirit.... No one there hearkened to the Christ that

calleth, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour!' They think it scorn to learn

from Him, because He is meek and lowly of heart. For Thou hast hidden these

things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

But it is not much to bend: what is, above all, requisite for him is to get

rid of his passions. Now Augustin's passions were old friends. How could

he part with them? He lacked courage for this heroic treatment. Just think

of what a young man of thirty-two is. He is always thinking of women. Lust

holds him by the entanglements of habit, and he takes pleasure in the

impurity of his heart. When, yielding to the exhortations of the Apostle,

he tried to shape his conduct to his new way of thinking, the old friends

trooped to beg of him not to do anything of the kind. "They pulled me," he

says, "by the coat of my flesh, and they murmured in my ear--What, are you

leaving us? Shall we be no more with you, for ever? \_Non erimus tecum ultra

in aeternum?\_... And from that instant, the thing you well know, and still

another thing, will be forbidden you for ever--for eternity...."

Eternity! Dread word. Augustin shook with fear. Then, calming himself, he

said to them: "I know you; I know you too well! You are Desire without

hope, the Gulf without soundings that nothing can fill up. I have suffered

enough because of you." And the anguished dialogue continued: "What

matters that! If the only possible happiness for you is to suffer on our

account, to fling your body into the voracious gulf, without end, without

hope!"--"Let cowards act so!... For me there is another happiness than

yours. There is \_something else\_: I am certain." Then the friends, put

a little out of countenance by this convinced tone, muttered in a lower

voice: "Still, just suppose you are losing this wretched pleasure for

a phantasm still more empty.... Besides, you are mistaken about your

strength. You cannot--no, you never can exist without us." They had touched

the galling spot: Augustin knew his weakness only too well. And his burning

imagination presented to him with extraordinary lucidity these pleasures

which he could not do without. They were not only embracements, but also

those trifles, those superfluous nothings, "those light pleasantnesses

which make us fond of life." The perfidious old friends continued to

whisper: "Wait a bit yet! The things you despise have a charm of their

own; they bring even no small sweetness. You ought not to cut yourself off

light-heartedly, for it would be shameful to return to them afterwards."

He passed in review all the things he was going to give up; he saw them

shine before him tinted in the most alluring colours: gaming, elaborate

entertainments, music, song, perfumes, books, poetry, flowers, the coolness

of forests (he remembered the woods about Thagaste, and his hunting days

with Romanianus)--in a word, all that he had ever cared about, even to

"that freshness of the light, so kind to human eyes."

Augustin was not able to decide in this conflict between temptation and the

decree of his conscience, and he became desperate. His will, enfeebled by

sin, was unable to struggle against itself. And so he continued to endure

life and to be "devoured by time."

The life of that particular period, if it was endurable for quiet folk

who were careful to have nothing to do with politics--this life of the

Empire near its end, could be nothing but a scandalous spectacle for an

honest-minded and high-souled man such as Augustin. It ought to have

disgusted him at once with remaining in the world. At Milan, connected as

he was with the Court, he was in a good position to see how much baseness

and ferocity may spring from human avarice and ambition. If the present

was hideous, the future promised to be sinister. The Roman Empire no longer

existed save in name. Foreigners, come from all the countries of the

Mediterranean, plundered the provinces under its authority. The army was

almost altogether in the hands of the Barbarians. They were Gothic tribunes

who kept order outside the basilica where Ambrose had closed himself in

with his people to withstand the order of the Empress Justina, who wished

to hand over this church to the Arians. Levantine eunuchs domineered over

the exchequer-clerks in the palace, and officials of all ranks. All these

people plundered where they could. The Empire, even grown feeble, was

always an excellent machine to rule men and extract gold from nations.

Accordingly, ambitious men and adventurers, wherever they came from, tried

for the Purple: it was still worth risking one's skin for. Even more than

the patriots (and there were still some very energetic men of this sort

who were overcome with grief at the state of things), the men of rapine

and violence were interested in maintaining the Empire. The Barbarians

themselves desired to be included, so that they might pillage it with more

impunity.

As for the emperors, even sincere Christians, they were obliged to become

abominable tyrants to defend their constantly threatened lives. Never were

executions more frequent or more cruel than at this time. At Milan they

might have shewn Augustin, hard by the Imperial sleeping apartments, the

cave where the preceding Emperor, choleric Valentinian, kept two bears,

"Bit of Gold" and "Innocence," who were his rapid executioners. He fed them

with the flesh of those condemned to die. Possibly "Bit of Gold" was still

living. "Innocence"--observe the atrocious irony of this name--had been

restored to the liberty of her native forests, as a reward for her good and

loyal services.

Was Augustin, who still thought of becoming an official, going to mix in

with this lot of swindlers, assassins, and brute beasts? As he studied them

near at hand, he felt his goodwill grow weak. Like all those who belong

to worn-out generations, he must have been disgusted with action and the

villainies it involves. Just before great catastrophes, or just after,

there is an epidemic of black pessimism which freezes delicate souls.

Besides, he was ill--a favourable circumstance for a disappointed man if he

entertains thoughts of giving up the world. In the fogs of Milan his chest

and throat became worse and worse. And then it is likely enough that he was

not succeeding better as rhetorician than he had at Rome. It was a kind

of fatality for all Africans. However great their reputation in their own

country, that was the end of it as soon as they crossed the sea. Apuleius,

the great man of Carthage, had tried the experiment to his cost. They had

made fun of his guttural Carthaginian pronunciation. The same kind of thing

happened to Augustin. The Milanese turned his African accent into ridicule.

He even found among them certain purists who discovered solecisms in his

phrases.

But these scratches at his self-respect, this increasing disgust of men

and things, were small matters compared to what was going on within him.

Augustin had a sick soul. The forebodings he had always been subject to

were now become the suffering of every moment. At certain times he was

assailed by those great waves of sadness which unfurl all of a sudden from

the depths of the unknown. In such minutes we believe that the whole world

is hurling itself against us. The great wave rolled him over; he got up

again all wounded. And he felt stretch forth in him a new will which was

not his own, under which the other, the will to sin, struggled. It was

like the approach of an invisible being whose contact overcame him with an

anguish which was full of pleasure. This being wanted to open out within

him, but the weight of his old sins prevented. Then his soul cried out in

pain.

In those moments, what a relief it was to let himself float on the

canticles of the Church! The liturgical chants were then something new in

the West. It was in the very year we are dealing with that St. Ambrose

started the custom in the Milanese basilicas.

The childhood of our hymns! One cannot think about that without being

moved. One envies Augustin for having heard them in their spring freshness.

These lovely musics, which were to sound during so many centuries, and

still soar against the vaults of cathedrals, were leaving the nest for the

first time. We cannot think that a day will come when they will fold their

wings and fall silent. Since human bodies, temples of the Holy Ghost, will

live again in glory, one would like to believe with Dante that the hymns,

temples of the Word, are likewise immortal, and that they will still be

heard in the everlasting. Doubtless in the twilight glens of Purgatory the

bewailing souls continue to sing the \_Te lucis ante terminum\_, even as in

the star-circles, where the Blessed move ever, will always leap up the

triumphant notes of the \_Magnificat\_....

Even on those who have lost the faith, the power of these hymns is

irresistible. "If you knew," said Renan, "the charm that the Barbarian

magicians knew how to put into their canticles. When I remember them, my

heart melts." The heart of Augustin, who had not yet the faith, melted too

in hearing them: "How I have cried, my God, over the hymns and canticles

when the sweet sound of the music of Thy Church thrilled my soul! As the

music flowed into my ears, and Thy truth trickled into my heart, the tide

of devotion swelled high within me, and the tears ran down, and there was

gladness in those tears." His heart cast off its heaviness, while his mind

was shaken by the heavenly music. Augustin loved music passionately. At

this time he conceived God as the Great Musician of the spheres; and soon

he will write that "we are a strophe in a poem." At the same time, the

vivid and lightning figures of the Psalms, sweeping over the insipid

metaphors of the rhetoric which encumbered his memory, awoke in the depths

of him his wild African imagination and sent him soaring. And then the

affectionate note, the plaint in those sacred songs: \_Deus, Deus meus!\_--"O

God! O \_my\_ God!" The Divinity was no longer a cold abstraction, a phantom

that withdrew into an unapproachable infinite; He became the actual

possession of the loving soul. He leant over His poor scarred creature,

took him in His arms, and comforted him like a kind father.

Augustin wept with tenderness and ecstasy, but also with despair. He wept

upon himself. He saw that he had not the courage to be happy with the only

possible happiness. What, indeed, was he seeking, unless it were to capture

this "blessed life" which he had pursued so long? What he had tried to get

out of all his loves was the complete gift of his soul--to realize himself

completely. Now, this completeness of self is only in God--\_in Deo salutari

meo\_. The souls we have wounded are in unison with us, and with themselves,

only in God.... And the sweet Christian symbolism invited him with its

most enticing images: the Shades of Paradise; the Fountain of Living

Water; the Repose in the Lord God; the green Branch of the Dove, harbinger

of peace.... But the passions still resisted. "To-morrow! Wait a little

yet! Shall we be no more with you, for ever? \_Non erimus tecum ultra in

aeternum?\_..." What a dismal sound in these syllables, and how terrifying

for a timid soul! They fell, heavy as bronze, on the soul of Augustin.

An end had to be put to it somehow. What was needed was some one who would

force him out of his indecision. Instinctively, led by that mysterious will

which he felt had arisen within him, he went to see, and consult in his

distress, an old priest named Simplicianus, who had converted or directed

Bishop Ambrose in his young days. No doubt Augustin spoke to him of what he

had lately been reading, and particularly of his Platonist studies, and of

all the efforts he made to enter the communion of Christ. He acknowledged

that he was convinced, but he could not bend to the practice of the

Christian life. Then, very skilfully, as one artful in differentiating

souls, perceiving that vanity was not yet dead in Augustin, Simplicianus

offered him as an example the very translator of those Platonic books which

he had just been reading so enthusiastically--that famous Victorinus Afer,

that orator so learned and admired, who had his statue in the Roman Forum.

Because of some remains of philosophical pride, and also from fear of

offending his friends among the Roman aristocracy, who were still almost

altogether pagan, Victorinus was a Christian only in his head. In vain

Simplicianus pointed out to him how illogical his conduct was. But suddenly

and unexpectedly he decided. The day of the baptism of the catechumens,

this celebrated man mounted the platform set up in the basilica for the

profession of faith of the newly converted, and there, like the meanest of

the faithful, he delivered his profession before all the assembled people.

That was a dramatic stroke. The crowd, jubilant over this fine performance,

cheered the neophyte. And on all sides they shouted: "Victorinus!

Victorinus!"

Augustin listened to this little story, whereof all the details were so

happily chosen to act on an imagination like his:--the statue in the

Roman Forum; the platform from the height of which the orator had spoken

a language so new and unexpected; the exulting shouts of the crowd:

"Victorinus! Victorinus!" Already he saw himself in the same position.

There he was in the basilica, on the platform, in presence of Bishop

Ambrose; he too repeated his profession of faith, and the people of Milan

clapped their hands--"Augustin! Augustin!" But can a humble and contrite

heart thus take pleasure in human adulation? If Augustin did become a

convert, it would be entirely for God and before God. Very quickly he put

aside the temptation.... Nevertheless, this example, coming from so exalted

a man, made a very deep and beneficial impression. He looked upon it as a

providential sign, a lesson in courage which concerned him personally.

Some time after that, he received a visit from a fellow-countryman, a

certain Pontitianus, who had a high position in the Imperial household.

Augustin happened to be alone in the house with his friend Alypius. They

sat down to talk, and by chance the visitor noticed the Epistles of St.

Paul lying on a table for playing games. This started the conversation.

Pontitianus, who was a Christian, praised the ascetic life, and especially

the wonders of holiness wrought by Antony and his companions in the

Egyptian deserts. This subject was in the air. In Catholic circles at

Rome, they spoke of little else than these Egyptian solitaries, and of

the number, growing larger and larger, of those who stripped themselves

of their worldly goods to live in utter renunciation. What was the good

of keeping these worldly goods, that the avarice of Government taxation

confiscated so easily, and that the Barbarians watched covetously from

afar! The brutes who came down from Germany would get hold of them sooner

or later. And even supposing one might save them, retain an ever-uncertain

enjoyment of them, was the life of the time really worth the trouble of

living? There was nothing more to hope for the Empire. The hour of the

great desolation was at hand....

Pontitianus, observing the effect of his words on his hearers, was led

to tell them a quite private adventure of his own. He was at Trèves, in

attendance on the Court. Well, one afternoon while the Emperor was at

the circus, he and three of his friends, like himself attached to the

household, went for a stroll beyond the city walls. Two of them parted

from the others and went off into the country, and there they came upon

a hut where dwelt certain hermits. They went in, and found a book--\_The

Life of St. Antony\_. They read in it; and for them that was a conversion

thunder-striking, instantaneous. The two courtiers resolved to join the

solitaries there and then, and they never went back to the Palace. And they

were betrothed!...

The tone of Pontitianus as he recalled this conscience-drama which he

had witnessed, betrayed a strange emotion which gradually took hold of

Augustin. His guest's words resounded in him like the blows of a clapper in

a bell. He saw himself in the two courtiers of Trèves. He too was tired of

the world, he too was betrothed. Was he going to do as the Emperor--remain

in the circus taken up with idle pleasures, while others took the road to

the sole happiness?

When Pontitianus was gone, Augustin was in a desperate state. The repentant

soul of the two courtiers had passed into his. His will uprose in grievous

conflict and tortured itself. He seized Alypius roughly by the arm and

cried out to him in extraordinary excitement:

"What are we about? Yes, I say, what are we about? Did you not hear? Simple

men arise and take Heaven by violence, and we with all our heartless

learning--look how we are wallowing in flesh and blood!"

Alypius stared at him, stupefied. "The truth is," adds Augustin, "that I

scarcely knew what I said. My face, my eyes, my colour, and the change in

my voice expressed my meaning much better than my words." If he guessed

from this upheaval of his whole frame how close at hand was the heavenly

visitation, all he felt at the moment was a great need to weep, and he

wanted solitude to weep freely. He went down into the garden. Alypius,

feeling uneasy, followed at a distance, and in silence sat down beside him

on the bench where he had paused. Augustin did not even notice that his

friend was there. His agony of spirit began again. All his faults, all his

old stains came once more to his mind, and he grew furious against his

cowardly feebleness as he felt how much he still clung to them. Oh, to tear

himself free from all these miseries--to finish with them once for all!...

Suddenly he sprang up. It was as if a gust of the tempest had struck him.

He rushed to the end of the garden, flung himself on his knees under a

fig-tree, and with his forehead pressed against the earth he burst into

tears. Even as the olive-tree at Jerusalem which sheltered the last watch

of the Divine Master, the fig-tree of Milan saw fall upon its roots a sweat

of blood. Augustin, breathless in the victorious embrace of Grace, panted:

"How long, how long?... To-morrow and to-morrow?... Why not now? Why not

this hour make an end of my vileness?..."

Now, at this very moment a child's voice from the neighbouring house began

repeating in a kind of chant: "\_Take and read, take and read\_." Augustin

shuddered. What was this refrain? Was it a nursery-rhyme that the little

children of the countryside used to sing? He could not recollect it; he had

never heard it before.... Immediately, as upon a divine command, he rose to

his feet and ran back to the place where Alypius was sitting, for he had

left St. Paul's Epistles lying there. He opened the book, and the passage

on which his eyes first fell was this: \_Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof\_.... The

flesh!... The sacred text aimed at him directly--at him, Augustin, still so

full of lust! This command was the answer from on high....

He put his finger between the leaves, closed the volume. His frenzy had

passed away. A great peace was shed upon him--it was all over. With a calm

face he told Alypius what had happened, and without lingering he went into

Monnica's room to tell her also. The Saint was not surprised. It was long

now since she had been told, "Where I am, there shalt thou be also." But

she gave way to an outburst of joy. Her mission was done. Now she might

sing her canticle of thanksgiving and enter into God's peace.

Meanwhile, the good Alypius, always circumspect and practical, had opened

the book again and shewn his friend what followed the verse, for Augustin,

in his excitement, had neglected to read further. The Apostle said, "\_Him

that is weak in the faith receive ye\_." This also applied to Augustin.

That was only too certain: his new faith was still very unsteady. Let not

presumption blind him! Yes, no doubt with all his soul he desired to be a

Christian. It now remained for him to become one.

THE FOURTH PART

THE HIDDEN LIFE

Fac me, Pater, quaerere te.

"Cause me to seek Thee, O my Father."

\_Soliloquies\_, I, i.

I

THE LAST SMILE OF THE MUSE

Now that Augustin had been at last touched by grace, was he after all

going to make a sensational conversion like his professional brother, the

celebrated Victorinus?

He knew well enough that there is a good example set by these noisy

conversions which works on a vast number of people. And however "contrite

and humble" his heart might be, he was quite aware that in Milan he

was an important personage. What excitement, if he were to resign his

professorship on the ground that he wished to spend the rest of his life in

the ascetic way of the Christians!... But he preferred to avoid the scandal

on one side, and the loud praise on the other. God alone and some very dear

friends should witness his repentance.

There were now hardly twenty days before the vacation. He would be patient

till then. Thus, the parents of his pupils would not have any ground to

reproach him for leaving them before the end of term, and as his health

was getting worse, he would have a good excuse to give up his post. The

dampness of the climate had given him a sort of chronic bronchitis which

the summer had not cured. He had difficulty in breathing; his voice was

muffled and thin--so much so, that he began to think his lungs were

attacked. Augustin's health really needed care. This was a quite good

enough reason to interrupt his lectures. Having fulfilled his professional

duties to the very end--and he assures us that it took some courage--he

left the professorial chair with the declared intention of never occupying

it again.

Here, then, he is free from all worldly ties. From now on he can prepare

himself for baptism in silence and retreat. But still he must live somehow!

Augustin had more souls depending on him than ever: his son, his mother,

his brother, his cousins--a heavy burthen which he had been struggling

under for a long time. It is probable that once more Romanianus, who was

still in Milan, came to his assistance. It will be remembered that the

Mæcenas of Thagaste had taken up warmly the plan of a lay monastery which

Augustin and his friends had lost their heads over, and he had promised

to subscribe a large sum. Augustin's retreat was a first step towards

realizing this plan in a new shape. Romanianus, no doubt, approved of

it. In any case, he asked Augustin to keep on giving lessons to his son

Licentius. Another young man, Trygetius, begged for the same favour.

Augustin therefore did not intend to give up his employment altogether. He

had changed, for the present at least, from a Government professor into a

private one.

This meant that he had a certain living. All he wanted now was a shelter.

A friend, a colleague, the grammarian Verecundus, graciously offered him

this. Verecundus thus repaid a favour which Augustin had quite recently

done him. It was at Augustin's request that Nebridius, who was a friend of

both, agreed to take over the classes of the grammarian, who was obliged

to go away. Although rich, full of talent, and very eager for peace and

solitude, Nebridius, simply out of good-nature, was willing to take the

place of Verecundus in his very modest employment. One cannot too much

admire the generosity and kindliness of these ancient and Christian

manners. In those days, friendship knew nothing of our narrow and shabby

egoisms.

Now Verecundus owned a country house just outside Milan, at Cassicium. He

suggested to Augustin to spend the vacation there, and even to live there

permanently with all his people, on condition of looking after the property

and keeping it up.

Attempts have been made to find traces of this hospitable dwelling where

the future monk of Thagaste and Hippo bade farewell to the world. Cassicium

has disappeared. The imagination is free to rebuild it fancifully in any

part of the rich country which lies about Milan. Still, if the youthful

Licentius has not yielded too much to metaphor in the verses wherein he

recalls to Augustin "Departed suns among Italian mountain-heights," it is

likely that the estate of Verecundus lay upon those first mountain-slopes

which roll into the Brianza range. Even to-day, the rich Milanese have

their country houses among those hills.

To Augustin and his companions this flourishing Lombardy must have seemed

another promised land. The country, wonderfully fertile and cultivated,

is one orchard, where fruit trees cluster, and, in all ways, deep streams

wind, slow-flowing and stocked with fish. Everywhere is the tremor of

running water--inconceivably fresh music for African ears. A scent of mint

and aniseed; fields with grass growing high and straight in which you

plunge up to the knees. Here and there, deeply engulfed little valleys

with their bunches of green covert, slashed with the rose plumes of the

lime trees and the burnished leaves of the hazels, and where already the

northern firs lift their black needles. Far off, blended in one violet

mass, the Alps, peak upon peak, covered with snow; and nearer in view,

sheer cliffs, jutting fastnesses, ploughed through with black gorges which

make flare out plainer the bronze-gold of their slopes. Not far off, the

enchanted lakes slumber. It seems that an emblazonment fluctuates from

their waters, and writhing above the crags which imprison them drifts

athwart a sky sometimes a little chill--Leonardo's pensive sky of shadowed

amethyst--again of a flushed blue, whereupon float great clouds, silken

and ruddy, as in the backgrounds of Veronese's pictures. The beauty of the

light lightens and beautifies the over-heavy opulence of the land.

And wherever the country house of Verecundus may be placed, some bit of

this triumphal landscape will be found. As for the house itself, Augustin

has said enough about it for us to see it fairly well. It was no doubt one

of those old rustic buildings, inhabited only some few months of the year,

in the warmest season, and for the rest of the time given over to the

frolics of mice and rats. Without any pretence to architectural form, it

had been enlarged and renovated simply for the greater convenience of those

who lived there. There was no attempt at symmetry; the main door was not in

the middle of the building, and there was another door on one of the sides.

The sole luxury of this country house was perhaps the bath-houses. These

baths, however simple they might be, nevertheless reminded Augustin of

the decoration of gymnasiums. Does this mean that he found there rich

pavements, mosaics, and statues? These were quite usual things in Roman

villas. The Italians have always had, at all periods, a great fondness

for statues and mosaics. Not very particular about the quality, they made

up for it by the quantity. And when they could not treat themselves to

the real thing, it was good enough to give themselves the make-believe in

painting. I can imagine easily enough Verecundus' house, painted in fresco

from top to bottom, inside and out, like those houses at Pompeii, or the

modern Milanese villas.

There was no attempt at ornamental gardens at Cassicium. The surroundings

must have been kitchen-garden, grazing-land, or ploughed fields, as in

a farm. A meadow--not in the least the lawns found in front of a large

country house--lay before the dwelling, which was protected from sun and

wind by clumps of chestnut trees. There, stretched on the grass under the

shade of one of these spreading trees, they chatted gaily while listening

to the broken song of the brook, as it flowed under the windows of the

baths. They lived very close to nature, almost the life of field-tillers.

The whole charm of Cassicium consisted in its silence, its peace, and,

above all, its fresh air. Augustin's tired lungs breathed there a purer air

than in Milan, where the humid summer heat is crushing. His soul, yearning

for retirement, discovered a retreat here in harmony with his new desires,

a country solitude of which the Virgilian grace still appealed to his

literary imagination. The days he passed there were days of blessedness for

him. Long afterwards he was deeply moved when he recalled them, and in an

outburst of gratitude towards his host, he prayed God to pay him his debt.

"Thou wilt recompense him, O Lord, on the day of the resurrection of the

just.... For that country house at Cassicium where we found shelter in Thee

from the burning summer of our time, Thou wilt repay to Verecundus the

coolness and evergreen shade of Thy paradise...."

That was an unequalled moment in Augustin's life. Following immediately

upon the mental crisis which had even worn out his body, he seems to be

experiencing the pleasure of convalescence. He slackens, and, as he says

himself, he rests. His excitement is quenched, but his faith remains

as firm as ever. With a cairn and supremely lucid mind he judges his

condition; he sees clearly all that he has still to do ere he becomes a

thorough Christian. First, he must grow familiar with the Scripture, solve

certain urgent questions--that of the soul, for example, its nature and

origin--which possessed him just then. Then he must change his conduct,

alter his ways of thought, and, if one may so speak, disinfect his mind

still all saturated with pagan influences: a delicate work--yes, and an

uneasy, at times even painful, which would take more than one day.

After twenty centuries of Christianity, and in spite of our claim to

understand all things, we do not yet realize very well what an abyss

lies between us and paganism. When by chance we come upon pagan traces

in certain primitive regions of the South of Europe, we get muddled, and

attribute to Catholicism what is but a survival of old abolished customs,

so far from us that we cannot recognize them any more. Augustin, on the

contrary, was right next to them. When he strolled over the fields and

through the woods around Cassicium, the Fauns and woodland Nymphs of the

old mythology haunted his memory, and all but stood before his eyes. He

could not take a walk without coming upon one of their chapels, or striking

against a boundary-mark still all greasy from the oil with which the

superstitious peasants had drenched it. Like himself, the old pagan land

had not yet quite put on the Christ of the new era. He was like that Hermes

Criophorus, who awkwardly symbolized the Saviour on the walls of the

Catacombs. Even as the Bearer of Rams changed little by little into the

Good Shepherd, the Bishop of Hippo emerged slowly from the rhetorician

Augustin.

He became aware of it during that languid autumn at Cassicium--that autumn

heavy with all the rotting of summer, but which already promised the

great winter peace. The yellow leaves of the chestnuts were heaped by the

roadside. They fell in the brook which flowed near the baths, and the

slowed water ceased to sing. Augustin strained his ears for it. His soul

also was blocked, choked up by all the deposit of his passions. But he knew

that soon the chant of his new life would begin in triumphal fashion, and

he said over to himself the words of the psalm: \_Cantate mihi canticum

novum\_--"Sing unto me a new song."

Unfortunately for Augustin, his soul and its salvation was not his only

care at Cassicium: he had a thousand others. So it shall be with him

throughout his life. Till the very end he will long for solitude, for the

life in God, and till the end God will charge him with the care of his

brethren. This great spirit shall live above all by charity.

At the house of Verecundus he was not only the head, but he had a complete

country estate to direct and supervise. Probably all the guests in the

house helped him. They divided the duties. The good Alypius, who was used

to business and versed in the twisted ways of the law, took over the

foreign affairs--the buying and selling, probably the accounts also. He was

continually on the road to Milan. Augustin attended to the correspondence,

and every morning appointed their work to the farm-labourers. Monnica

looked after the household, no easy work in a house where nine sat down to

table every day. But the Saint fulfilled her humble duties with touching

kindness and forgetfulness of self: "She took care of us," says Augustin,

"as if we had all been her children, and she served us as if each of us had

been her father."

Let us look a little at these "children" of Monnica. Besides Alypius, whom

we know already, there was the young Adeodatus, the child of sin--"my son

Adeodatus, whose gifts gave promise of great things, unless my love for

him betrays me." Thus speaks his father. This little boy was, it seems,

a prodigy, as shall be the little Blaise Pascal later: "His intelligence

filled me with awe"--\_horrori mihi erat illud ingenium\_--says the father

again. What is certain is that he had a soul like an angel. Some sayings

of his have been preserved by Augustin. They are fragrant as a bunch of

lilies.

The other members of the family are nearer the earth. Navigius, Augustin's

brother, an excellent man of whom we know nothing save that he had a bad

liver--the icterus of the African colonist--and that on this account he

abstained from sweetmeats. Rusticus and Lastidianus, the two cousins,

persons as shadowy as the "supers" in a tragedy. Finally, Augustin's

pupils, Trygetius and Licentius. The first, who had lately served some time

in the army, was passionately fond of history, "like a veteran." Although

his master in some of his Dialogues has made him his interlocutor, his

character remains for us undeveloped. With Licentius it is different. This

son of Romanianus, the Mæcenas of Thagaste, was Augustin's beloved pupil.

It is easy to make that out. All the phrases he devotes to Licentius have a

warmth of tone, a colour and relief which thrill.

This Licentius comes before us as the type of the spoiled child, the son of

a wealthy family, capricious, vain, presuming, unabashed, never hesitating

if he sees a chance to have a joke with his master. Forgetful, besides,

prone to sudden fancies, superficial, and rather blundering. With all

that, the best boy in the world--a bad head, but a good heart. He was a

frank pagan, and I believe remained a pagan all his life, in spite of the

remonstrances of Augustin and those of the gentle Paulinus of Nola, who

lectured him in prose and verse. A great eater and a fine drinker, he

found himself obliged to do penance at St. Monnica's rather frugal table.

But when the fever of inspiration took hold of him, he forgot eating and

drinking, and in his poetical thirst he would would have drained--so his

master says--all the fountains of Helicon. Licentius had a passion for

versifying: "He is an almost perfect poet," wrote Augustin to Romanianus.

The former rhetorician knew the world, and the way to talk to the father

of a wealthy pupil, especially if he is your benefactor. At Cassicium,

under Augustin's indulgent eyes, the pupil turned into verse the romantic

adventure of Pyramus and Thisbe. He declaimed bits of it to the guests

in the house, for he had a fine loud voice. Then he flung aside the

unfinished poem and suddenly fell in love with Greek tragedies of which,

as it happened, he understood nothing at all, though this did not prevent

him from boring everybody he met with them. Another day it was the Church

music, then quite new, which flung him into enthusiasm. That day they heard

Licentius singing canticles from morning till night.

In connection with this, Augustin relates with candid freedom an anecdote

which to-day needs the indulgence of the reader to make it acceptable. As

it gives light upon that half-pagan, half-Christian way of life which was

still Augustin's, I will repeat it in all its plainness.

It happened, then, one evening after dinner, that Licentius went out and

took his way to a certain mysterious retreat, and there he suddenly began

singing this verse of the Psalm: "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause

Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." As a matter of fact, he had

hardly sung anything else for a long time. He kept on repeating this verse

over and over again, as people do with a tune they have just picked up. But

the pious Monnica, who heard him, could not tolerate the singing of such

holy words in such a place. She spoke sharply to the offender. Upon this

the young scatter-brains answered rather flippantly:

"Supposing, good mother, that an enemy had shut me up in that place--do you

mean to say that God wouldn't have heard me just the same?"

The next day he thought no more about it, and when Augustin reminded him,

he declared that he felt no remorse.

"As far as I am concerned," replied the excellent master, "I am not in the

least shocked by it.... The truth is, that neither that place, which has

so much scandalized my mother, nor the darkness of night, is altogether

inappropriate to this canticle. For whence, think you, do we implore God

to drag us, so that we may be converted and gaze upon His face? Is it not

from that jakes of the senses wherein our souls are plunged, and from that

darkness of which the error is around us?..."

And as they were discussing that day the order established by Providence,

Augustin made it a pretext to give a little edifying lecture to his pupil.

Having heard the sermon to the end, the sharp Licentius put in with sly

maliciousness:

"I say, what a splendid arrangement of events to shew me that nothing

happens except in the best way, and for our great good!"

This reply gives us the tone of the conversation between Augustin and

his pupils. Nevertheless, however free and merry the talks might be, the

purpose was always instructive, and it was always substantial. Let us not

forget that the Milanese rhetorician is still a professor. The best part of

his days was devoted to these two youths who had been put under his charge.

As soon as he had settled the business of the farm, talked to the peasants,

and given his orders to the workmen, he fell back upon his business of

rhetorician. In the morning they went over Virgil's \_Eclogues\_ together. At

night they discussed philosophy. When the weather was fine they walked in

the fields, and the discussion continued under the shade of the chestnut

trees. If it rained, they took refuge in the withdrawing-room adjoining the

baths. Beds were there, cushions, soft chairs convenient for talking, and

the equal temperature from the vapour-baths close at hand was good for

Augustin's bronchial tubes.

There is no stiffness in these dialogues, nothing which smacks of the

school. The discussion starts from things which they had under the eyes,

often from some slight accidental happening. One night when Augustin could

not sleep--he often suffered from insomnia--the dispute began in bed, for

the master and his pupils slept in the same room. Lying there in the dark,

he listened to the broken murmur of the stream. He was trying to think out

an explanation of the pauses in the sound, when Licentius shifted under the

bedclothes, and reaching out for a piece of stick lying on the floor, he

rapped with it on the foot of the bed to frighten the mice. So he was not

asleep either, nor Trygetius, who was stirring about in his bed. Augustin

was delighted: he had two listeners. Immediately he put this question: "Why

do those pauses come in the flow of the stream? Do they not follow some

secret law?..." They had hit upon a subject for debate. During many days

they discussed the order of the world.

Another time, as they were going into the baths, they stopped to look

at two cocks fighting. Augustin called the attention of the youths "to

a certain order full of propriety in all the movements of these fowls

deprived of reason."

"Look at the conqueror," said he. "He crows triumphantly. He struts and

plumes himself as a proud sign of victory. And now look at the beaten one,

without voice, his neck unfeathered, a look of shame. All that has I know

not what beauty, in harmony with the laws of nature...."

New argument in favour of order: the debate of the night before is started

rolling again.

For us, too, it is well worth while to pause on this little homely scene.

It reveals to us an Augustin not only very sensitive to beauty, but very

attentive to the sights of the world surrounding him. Cockfights were still

very popular in this Roman society at the ending of the Empire. For a long

time sculptors had found many gracious subjects in the sport. Reading this

passage of Augustin's, one recalls, among other similar designs, that

funeral urn at the Lateran upon which are represented two little boys, one

crying over his beaten cock, while the other holds his tenderly in his

arms and kisses it--the cock that won, identified by the crown held in its

spurs.

Augustin is always very close to these humble realities. Every moment

outside things start up in the dialogues between the master and his

pupils.... They are in bed on a rainy night in November. Gradually, a vague

gleam rests on the windows. They ask each other if that can be the moon, or

the break of day.... Another time, the sun rises in all its splendour, and

they decide to go into the meadow and sit on the grass. Or else, the sky

darkens and lights are brought in. Or again, it is the appearance of

diligent Alyphis, just come back from Milan....

In the same way as he notes these light details in passing, Augustin

welcomes all his guests into his dialogues and admits them to the debate:

his mother, his brother, the cousins, Alypius between his business

journeys, down to the child Adeodatus. He knew the value of ordinary good

sense, the second-sight of a pure heart, or of a pious soul strengthened by

prayer. Monnica used often to come into the room when they were arguing,

to let them know that dinner was ready, or for something of the kind. Her

son asked her to remain. Modestly she shewed her astonishment at such an

honour.

"Mother," said Augustin, "do you not love truth? Then why should I blush

to give you a place among us? Even if your love for truth were only

half-hearted, I ought still to receive you and listen to you. How much more

then, since you love it more than you love me, \_and I know how much you

love me\_.... Nothing can separate you from truth, neither fear, nor pain

of whatever kind it be--no, nor death itself. Do not all agree that this

is the highest stage of philosophy? How can I hesitate after that to call

myself your disciple?"

And Monnica, utterly confused by such praise, answered with affectionate

gruffness:

"Stop talking! You have never told bigger lies."

Most of the time these conversations were simply dialectic games in the

taste of the period, games a little pedantic, and fatiguing from subtilty.

The boisterous Licentius did not always enjoy himself. He was often

inattentive; and his master scolded him. But all the same, the master

understood how to amuse his two foster-children while he exercised their

intelligence. At the end of one discussion he said to them laughing:

"Just at this hour, the sun warns me to put the playthings I had brought

for the children back in the basket...."

Let us remark in passing that this is the last time, before those

centuries which are coming of universal intellectual silence or arid

scholasticism--the last time that high questions will be discussed in this

graceful light way, and with the same freedom of mind. The tradition begun

by Socrates under the plane-trees on the banks of the Ilissus, is ending

with Augustin under the chestnuts of Cassicium.

And yet, however gay and capricious the form, the substance of these

dialogues, "On the Academics," "On Order," and "On the Happy Life," is

serious, and even very serious. The best proof of their importance in

Augustin's eyes is, that after taking care to have them reported in

shorthand, he eventually published them. The \_notarii\_ attended these

discussions and let nothing be lost. The rise of the scrivener, of the

notary, dates from this period. The administration of the Lower-Empire was

frightfully given to scribbling. By contact with it, the Church became so

too. Let us not press our complaints about it, since this craze for writing

has procured for us, with a good deal of shot-rubbish, some precious

historical documents. In Augustin's case, these reports of his lectures at

Cassicium have at least the value of shewing us the state of soul of the

future Bishop of Hippo at a decisive moment of his life.

For these \_Dialogues\_, although they look like school exercises, reveal the

intimate thoughts of Augustin on the morrow of his conversion. While he

seems to be refuting the Academics, he is fighting the errors from which

he, personally, had suffered so long. He clarified his new ideal. No; the

search for truth, without hope of ever reaching it, cannot give happiness.

And genuine happiness is only in God. And if a rhythm is to be found in

things, then it is necessary to make the soul rhythmic also and so enable

it to contemplate God. It is necessary to still within it the noise of the

passions. Hence, the need of inward reformation, and, at a final analysis,

of asceticism.

But Augustin knew full well that these truths must be adapted to the

weakness of the two lads he was teaching, and also to the common run of

mankind. He has not yet in these years the uncompromising attitude which

ere long will give him a sterner virtue--an attitude, however, unceasingly

tempered by his charity and by the persistent recollections of his reading.

It was now that he shaped the rule of conduct in worldly morals and

education which the Christian experience of the future will adopt: "If you

have always order in your hearts," he said to his pupils, "you must return

to your verses. \_For a knowledge of liberal sciences, but a controlled and

exact knowledge\_, forms men who will love the truth.... But there are other

men, or, to put it better, other souls, who, although held in the body, are

sought for the eternal marriage by the best and fairest of spouses. For

these souls it is not enough to live; they wish to live happy.... But as

for you, go, \_meanwhile\_, and find your Muses!"

"Go and find your Muses!" What a fine saying! How human and how wise! Here

is clearly indicated the double ideal of those who continue to live in the

world according to the Christian law of restraint and moderation, and of

those who yearn to live in God. With Augustin the choice is made. He will

never more look back. These Dialogues at Cassicium are his supreme farewell

to the pagan Muse.

II

THE ECSTASY OF SAINT MONNICA

They stayed through the winter at Cassicium. However taken up he might be

by the work of the estate and the care of his pupils, Augustin devoted

himself chiefly to the great business of his salvation.

The \_Soliloquies\_, which he wrote then, render even the passionate tone of

the meditations which he perpetually gave way to during his watches and

nights of insomnia. He searched for God, moaning: \_Fac me, Pater, quærere

te\_--"Cause me to seek Thee, O my Father." But still, he sought Him more as

a philosopher than as a Christian. The old man in him was not dead. He had

not quite stripped off the rhetorician or the intellectual. The over-tender

heart remained, which had so much sacrificed to human love. In those ardent

dialogues between himself and his reason, it is plain to see that reason

is not quite the mistress. "I love only God and the soul," Augustin states

with a touch of presumption. And his reason, which knows him well, answers:

"Do you not then love your friends?"--"I love the soul; how therefore

should I not love them?" What does this phrase, of such exquisite

sensibility, and even already so aloof from worldly thoughts--what does

it lack to give forth a sound entirely Christian? Just a slight change of

accent.

He himself began to see that he would do better not to philosophize so much

and to draw nearer the Scripture, in listening to the wisdom of that with

a contrite and humble heart. Upon the directions of Ambrose, whose advice

he had asked by letter, he tried to read the prophet Isaiah, because

Isaiah is the clearest foreteller of the Redemption. He found the book so

difficult that he lost heart, and he put it aside till later. Meanwhile,

he had forwarded his resignation as professor of Rhetoric to the Milan

municipality. Then, when the time was come, he sent to Bishop Ambrose

a written confession of his errors and faults, and represented to him

his very firm intention to be baptized. He was quietly baptized on the

twenty-fifth of April, during the Easter season of the year 387, together

with his son Adeodatus, and his friend Alypius. Alypius had prepared most

piously, disciplining himself with the harshest austerities, to the point

of walking barefoot on the frozen soil.

So now the solitaries of Cassicium are back in Milan. Augustin's two pupils

were gone. Trygetius doubtless had rejoined the army. Licentius had gone

to live in Rome. But another fellow-countryman, an African from Thagaste,

Evodius, formerly a clerk in the Ministry of the Interior, came to join

the small group of new converts. Evodius, the future Bishop of Uzalis, in

Africa, and baptized before Augustin, was a man of scrupulous piety and

unquestioning faith. He talked of devout subjects with his friend, who,

just fresh from baptism, experienced all the quietude of grace. They spoke

of the community which St. Ambrose had either founded or organized at

the gates of Milan, and in comparison with a life so austere, Augustin

perceived that the life he had led at Cassicium was still stained with

paganism. He must carry out his conversion to the end and live as a hermit

after the manner of Antony and the solitaries of the Thebaid. Then it

occurred to him that he still owned a little property at Thagaste--a house

and fields. There they would settle and live in self-denial like the

monks. The purity of the young Adeodatus predestined him to this ascetic

existence. As for Monnica, who long since had taken the widow's veil, she

had to make no change in her ways to lead a saintly life in the company of

her son and grandson. It was agreed among them all to go back to Africa,

and to start as soon as possible.

Thus, just after his baptism, Augustin shews but one desire: to bury

himself in a retreat, to lead a humble and hidden life, divided between the

study of the Scripture and the contemplation of God. Later on, his enemies

were to accuse him of having become a convert from ambition, in view of the

honours and riches of the episcopate. This is sheer calumny. His conversion

could not have been more sincere, more disinterested--nor more heroic

either: he was thirty-three years old. When we think of all he had loved

and all he gave up, we can only bow the head and bend the knee before the

lofty virtue of such an example.

In the course of the summer the caravan started and crossed the Apennines

to set sail at Ostia. The date of this exodus has never been made quite

clear. Perhaps Augustin and his companions fled before the hordes of the

usurper Maximus, who, towards the end of August, crossed the Alps and

marched on Milan, while the young Valentinian with all his Court took

refuge at Aquileia. In any case, it was a trying journey, especially in the

hot weather. When Monnica arrived she was very enfeebled. At Ostia they had

to wait till a ship was sailing for Africa. Propitious conditions did not

offer every day. At this period, travellers were at the mercy of the sea,

of the wind, and of a thousand other circumstances. Time did not count; it

was wasted freely. The ship sailed short distances at a time, skirting the

coasts, where the length of the stay at every point touched depended on the

master. On board these ships--feluccas hardly decked over--if the crossing

was endless and unsafe, it was, above all, most uncomfortable. People were

in no hurry to undergo the tortures of it, and spaced them out as much

as possible by frequent stoppages. On account of all these reasons, our

Africans made a rather long stay at Ostia. They lodged, no doubt, with

Christian brethren, hosts of Augustin or Monnica, in a tranquil house far

out of earshot of the cosmopolitan crowd which overflowed in the hotels on

the quay.

Ostia, situated at the mouth of the Tiber, was both the port and

bond-warehouse of Rome. The Government stores-ships landed the African oil

and corn there. It was a junction for commerce, the point where immigrants

from all parts of the Mediterranean disbarked. To-day there is only left

a wretched little village. But at some distance from this hamlet, the

excavations of archæologists have lately brought to light the remains of

a large town. They have discovered at the entrance a place of burial with

arcosol-tombs; and here perhaps the body of St. Monnica was laid. In this

place of graves they came upon also a beautiful statue injured--a funeral

Genius, or a Victory, with large folded wings like those of the Christian

angels. Further on, the forum with its shops, the guard-house of the

night-cohort, baths, a theatre, many large temples, arcaded streets paved

with large flags, warehouses for merchandise. There may still be seen,

lining the walls, the holes in which the ends of the amphoræ used to be

dropped to keep them upright. All this wreckage gives an idea of a populous

centre where the stir of traffic and shipping was intense.

And yet in this noisy town, Augustin and his mother found means to withdraw

themselves and join together in meditation and prayer. Amid this rather

vulgar activity, in a noise of trade and seafaring, a mystic scene develops

where the purified love of mother and son gleams upon us as in a light of

apotheosis. They had at Ostia a foretaste, so to speak, of the eternal

union in God. This was in the house where they had come on arrival. They

talked softly, resting against a window which looked upon the garden....

But the scene has been made popular by Ary Scheffer's too well-known

painting. You remember it: two faces, pale, bloodless, stripped of flesh,

in which live only the burning eyes cast upward to the sky--a dense sky,

baffling, heavy with all the secrets of eternity. No visible object,

nothing, absolutely nothing, distracts them from their contemplation. The

sea itself, although indicated by the painter, almost blends into the

blue line of the horizon. Two souls and the sky--there you have the whole

subject.

It is living poetry congealed in abstract thought. The attitude of the

characters, majestically seated, instead of leaning on the window-ledge,

has, in Scheffer's picture, I know not what touch of stiffness, of slightly

theatrical. And the general impression is a cold dryness which contrasts

with the lyric warmth of the story in the \_Confessions\_.

For my part, I always thought, perhaps on the testimony of the picture,

that the window of the house at Ostia opened above the garden in view of

the sea. The sea, symbol of the infinite, ought to be present--so it seemed

to me--at the final conversation between Monnica and Augustin. At Ostia

itself I was obliged to give up this too literary notion; the sea is not

visible there. No doubt at that time the channel was not so silted up as it

is to-day. But the coast lies so low, that just hard by the actual mouth of

the Tiber, the nearness of the sea can only be guessed by the reflection of

the waves in the atmosphere, a sort of pearly halo, trembling on the edge

of the sky. At present I am inclined to think that the window of the house

at Ostia was very likely turned towards the vast melancholy horizon of the

\_Agro Romano\_. "We passed through, one after another," says Augustin, "all

the things of a material order, unto heaven itself." Is it not natural to

suppose that these things of a material order--these shapes of the earth

with its plantations, its rivers, towns, and mountains--were under their

eyes? The bleak spectacle which unrolled before their gaze agreed, at all

events, with the disposition of their souls.

This great desolate plain has nothing oppressive, nothing which retains

the eyes upon details too material. The colours about it are pale and

slight, as if on the point of swooning away. Immense sterile stretches,

fawn-coloured throughout, with here and there shining a little pink, a

little green; gorse, furze-bushes by the deep banks of the river, or a few

\_boschetti\_ with dusty leaves, which feebly stand out upon the blondness

of the soil. To the right, a pine forest. To the left, the undulations of

the Roman hills expire into an emptiness infinitely sad. Afar, the violet

scheme of the Alban mountains, with veiled and dream-like distances, shape

indefinitely against the pearl light, limpid and serene, of the sky.

Augustin and Monnica, resting on the window-ledge, looked forth. Doubtless

it was towards evening, at the hour when southern windows are thrown open

to the cool after a burning day. They looked forth. "We marvelled," says

Augustin, "at the beauty of Thy works, O my God!..." Rome was back there

beyond the hills, with its palaces, its temples, the gleam of its gilding

and its marbles. But the far-off image of the imperial city could not

conquer the eternal sadness which rises from the \_Agro\_. An air of funeral

loneliness lay above this plain, ready to be engulfed by the creeping

shadows. How easy it was to break free of these vain corporeal appearances

which decomposed of themselves! "Then," Augustin resumes, "we soared with

glowing hearts still higher." (He speaks as if he and his mother were risen

with equal flight to the vision. It is more probable that he was drawn

up by Monnica, long since familiar with the ways of the spirit, used to

visions, and to mystic talks with God....) Where was this God? All the

creatures, questioned by their anguished entreaty, answered: \_Quære super

nos\_--"Seek above us!" They sought; they mounted higher and higher: "And

so we came to our own minds, and passed beyond them into the region of

unfailing plenty, where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of

truth.... And as we talked, and we strove eagerly towards this divine

region, \_by a leap with the whole force of our hearts, we touched it for

an instant\_.... Then we sighed, we fell back, and left there fastened the

first fruits of the Spirit, and heard again the babble of our own tongues,

this mortal speech wherein each word has a beginning and an ending."

"We fell back!" The marvellous vision had vanished. But a great silence was

about them, silence of things, silence of the soul. And they said to each

other:

"If the tumult of the flesh were hushed; hushed these shadows of earth,

sea, sky; suppose this vision endured, and all other far inferior modes of

vision were taken away, and this alone were to ravish the beholder, and

absorb him, and plunge him in mystic joy, so that eternal life might be

like this moment of comprehension which has made us sigh with Love--might

not that be the fulfilment of 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'? Ah,

when shall this be? Shall it not be, O my God, when we rise again among the

dead...?"

Little by little they came down to earth. The dying colours of the

sunset-tide smouldered into the white mists of the \_Agro\_. The world

entered into night. Then Monnica, impelled by a certain presentiment, said

to Augustin:

"My son, as for me, I find no further pleasure in life. What I am still to

do, or why I still linger here, I know not.... There was only one thing

made me want to tarry a little longer in this life, that I might see you a

Christian and a Catholic before I died. My God has granted me this boon far

beyond what I hoped for. So what am I doing here?"

She felt it; her work was done. She had exhausted, as Augustin says, all

the hope of the century--\_consumpta spe sæculi\_. For her the parting was

near. This ecstasy was that of one dying, who has raised a corner of the

veil, and who no longer belongs to this world.

\* \* \* \* \*

And, in fact, five or six days later she fell ill. She had fever. The

climate of Ostia bred fevers, as it does to-day, and it was always

unsanitary on account of all the foreigners who brought in every infection

of the Orient. Furthermore, the weariness of a long journey in summer had

worn out this woman, old before her time. She had to go to bed. Soon she

got worse, and then lost consciousness. They believed she was in the agony.

They all came round her bed--Augustin, his brother Navigius, Evodius, the

two cousins from Thagaste, Rusticus, and Lastidianus. But suddenly she

shuddered, raised herself, and asked in a bewildered way:

"Where was I?"

Then, seeing the grief on their faces, she knew that she was lost, and she

said in a steady voice:

"You will bury your mother here."

Navigius, frightened by this sight of death, protested with all his

affection for her:

"No. You will get well, mother. You will come home again. You won't die in

a foreign land."

She looked at him with sorrowful eyes, as if hurt that he spoke so little

like a Christian, and turning to Augustin:

"See how he talks," she said.

And after a silence, she went on in a firmer voice, as if to impress on her

sons her final wishes:

"Lay this body where you will, and be not anxious about it. Only I beseech

you, remember me at the altar of God, wherever you are."

That was the supreme renunciation. How could an African woman, so much

attached to her country, agree to be buried in a stranger soil? Pagan

notions were still very strong in this community, and the place of burial

was an important consideration. Monnica, like all other widows, had settled

upon hers. At Thagaste she had had her place prepared beside her husband

Patricius. And here now she appeared to give that up. Augustin's companions

were astonished at such abnegation. As for himself, he marvelled at the

completeness of the change worked in his mother's soul by Grace. And as he

thought over all the virtues of her life, the strength of her faith--from

that moment, he had no doubt that she was a saint.

She still lingered for some time. Finally, on the ninth day of her illness,

she died at the age of fifty-six.

Augustin closed her eyes. A great sorrow surged into his heart. And yet he

who was so quick to tears had the courage not to cry.... Suddenly a noise

of weeping rose in the room of death: it was the young Adeodatus, who

lamented at the sight of the corpse. He sobbed in such a heartbroken way

that those who were there, demoralized by the distress of it, were obliged

to rebuke him. This struck Augustin so deeply, that many years afterwards

the broken sound of this sobbing still haunted his ears. "Methought," he

says, "that it was my own childish soul which thus broke out in the weeping

of my son." As for him, with the whole effort of his reason struggling

against his heart, he only wanted to think of the glory which the saint

had just entered into. His companions felt likewise. Evodius caught up a

psalter, and before Monnica's body, not yet cold, he began to chant the

Psalm, "My song shall be of mercy and judgment; unto Thee, O Lord, will I

sing." All who were in the house took up the responses.

In the meantime, while the layers-out were preparing the corpse for burial,

the brethren drew Augustin into another room. His friends and relations

stood round him. He consoled the others and himself. He spoke, as the

custom was, upon the deliverance of the faithful soul and the happiness

which is promised. They might have imagined that he had no sense of grief,

"But in Thy hearing, O my God, where none of them could hear, I was chiding

the softness of my heart, and holding back the tide of sorrow.... Alas!

well did I know what I was choking down in my heart."

Not even at the church, where the sacrifice was offered for Monnica's

soul, nor at the cemetery before the coffin, did he weep. From a sense of

Christian seemliness, he feared to scandalize his brethren by imitating

the desolation of the pagans and of those who die without hope. But this

very effort that he made to keep back his tears became another cause of

suffering. The day ended in a black sadness, a sadness he could not shake

off. It stifled him. Then he remembered the Greek proverb--"The bath

drives away sorrow;" and he determined to go and bathe. He went into the

\_tepidarium\_ and stretched himself out on the hot slab. Useless remedy!

"The bitterness of my trouble was not carried from my heart with the sweat

that flowed from my limbs." The attendants rolled him in warm towels and

led him to the resting-couch. Worn out by tiredness and so many emotions,

he fell into a heavy sleep. The next day, upon awaking, a fresh briskness

was in all his being. Some verses came singing into his memory; they were

the first words of the confident and joyous hymn of St. Ambrose:

"Creator of the earth and sky,

Ruling the firmament on high,

Clothing the day with robes of light,

Blessing with gracious sleep the night,--

That rest may comfort weary men

To face their usual toil again,

And soothe awhile the harassed mind,

And sorrow's heavy load unbind."

Suddenly, at the word \_sorrow\_, the thought of his dead mother came back

to him, with the regret for that kind heart he had lost. A wave of despair

overwhelmed him. He flung himself sobbing on the bed, and at last wept all

the tears he had pent up so long.

III

THE MONK OF THAGASTE

Almost a year went by before Augustin continued his journey. It is hard to

account for this delay. Why should he thus put off his return to Africa, he

who was so anxious to fly the world?

It is likely that Monnica's illness, the arrangements about her funeral,

and other matters to settle, kept him at Ostia till the beginning of

winter. The weather became stormy, the sea dangerous. Navigation was

regularly interrupted from November--sometimes even earlier, from the

first days of October, if the tempests and the equinox were exceptionally

violent. It would then be necessary to wait till spring. Besides, word

came that the fleet of the usurper Maximus, then at war with Theodosius,

blockaded the African coast. Travellers ran the risk of being captured by

the enemy. From all these reasons, Augustin would be prevented from sailing

before the end of the following summer. In the meantime, he went to live in

Rome. He employed his leisure to work up a case against the Manichees, his

brethren of the day before. Once he had adopted Catholicism, he must have

expected passionate attacks from his former brothers in religion. To close

their mouths, he gathered against them an elaborate mass of documents,

bristling with the latest scandals. He busied himself also with a

thorough study of their doctrines, the better to refute them: in him the

dialectician never slept. Then, when he had an opportunity, he visited the

Roman monasteries, studying their rule and organization, so as to decide on

a model for the convent which he always intended to establish in his own

country. At last, he went back to Ostia some time in August or September,

388, where he found a ship bound for Carthage.

Four years earlier, about the same time of year, he had made the same

voyage, coming the opposite way. He had a calm crossing; hardly could one

notice the movement of the ship. It is the season of smooth seas in the

Mediterranean. Never is it more etherial than in these summer months. The

vague blue sky is confused with the bleached sea, spread out in a large

sheet without creases--liquid and flexible silk, swept by quivering amber

glow and orange saffron when the sun falls. No distinct shape, only strange

suffusions of soft light, a pearl-like haze, the wistful blue reaching away

indefinably.

At Carthage, Augustin had grown used to the magnificence of this pageantry

of the sea. Now, the sea had the same appeased and gleaming face he had

seen four years sooner. But how much his soul had since been changed!

Instead of the tumult and falsehood which rent his heart and filled it

with darkness, the serene light of Truth, and deeper than the sea's peace,

the great appeasement of Grace. Augustin dreamed. Far off the Æolian isles

were gloomed in the impending shadows, the smoky crater of Stromboli was

no more than a black point circled by the double blue of waves and sky. So

the remembrance of his passions, of all that earlier life, sank under the

triumphant uprising of heavenly peace. He believed that this blissful state

was going to continue and fill all the hours of his new life, and he knew

of nothing so sweet....

This time, again, he was mistaken about himself. Upon the thin plank of the

boat which carried him, he did not feel the force of the immense element,

asleep now under his feet, but quick to be unchained at the first gust of

wind; and he did not feel either the overflowing energy swelling his heart

renewed by Grace--an energy which was going to set in motion one of the

most complete and strenuous existences, one of the richest in thought,

charity, and works which have enlightened history. Thinking only of the

cloister, amidst the friends who surrounded him, no doubt he repeated the

words of the Psalm: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren

to dwell together in unity." He pressed the hands of Alypius and Evodius,

and tears came to his eyes.

The sun was gone. All the cold waste of waters, forsaken by the gleam,

blurred gradually in vague anguish beneath the fall of night.

\* \* \* \* \*

After skirting the Sicilian coasts, they arrived at last at Carthage.

Augustin did not linger there; he was eager to see Thagaste once more, and

to retire finally from the world. Favourable omens drew him to the place,

and seemed to hearten him in his resolution. A dream had foretold his

return to his former pupil, Elogius, the rhetorician. He was present, too,

at the miraculous cure of a Carthage lawyer, Innocentius, in whose house he

dwelt with his friends.

Accordingly, he left for Thagaste as soon as he could. There he made

himself popular at once by giving to the poor, as the Gospel prescribed,

what little remained of his father's heritage. But he does not make clear

enough what this voluntary privation exactly meant. He speaks of a house

and some little meadows--\_paucis agellulis\_--that he sequestrated. Still,

he did not cease to live in the house all the time he was at Thagaste. The

probability is that he did sell the few acres of land he still owned and

bestowed the product of the sale on the poor. As to the house, he must have

made it over with the outbuildings to the Catholic body of his native town,

on condition of keeping the usufruct and of receiving for himself and his

brethren the necessities of life. At this period many pious persons acted

in this way when they gave their property to the Church. Church goods

being unseizable, and exempt from taxation, this was a roundabout way of

getting the better of fiscal extortion, whether in the shape of arbitrary

confiscations, or eviction by force of arms. In any case, such souls as

were tired of the world and longing for repose, found in these bequests an

heroic method of saving themselves the trouble of looking after a fortune

or a landed estate. When these fortunes and lands were extensive, the

generous donors felt, we are told, an actual relief in getting rid of them.

This financial question settled, Augustin took up the task of turning the

house into a monastery, like those he had seen at Rome and Milan. His son

Adeodatus, his friends Alypius and Evodius, Severus, who became Bishop

of Milevia, shared his solitude. But it is certain that he had other

solitaries with him whom he alludes to in his letters. Their rule was as

yet a little easy, no doubt. The brothers of Thagaste were not confined

in a cloister. They were simply obliged to fasts, to a special diet, to

prayers and meditations in common.

In this half-rustic retreat (the monastery was situated at the gates of

the town) Augustin was happy: he had at last realized the project he had

had so long at heart. To enter into himself, pray, above all, to study

the Scripture, to fathom even its most obscure places, to comment it with

the fervour and piety which the African of all times has brought to \_what

is written down\_--it seemed to him that he had enough there to fill all

the minutes of his life. But no man can teach, lecture, discuss, write,

during twenty years, in vain. However much Augustin might be converted, he

remembered the school at Thagaste, just as he did at Cassicium. Still, it

was necessary to finish with this sort of thing once for all. The new monk

made what may be called his will as a professor.

He finished, at this time, or revised his school treatises, which he had

begun at Milan, comprising all the liberal arts--grammar, dialectic,

rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, philosophy, music. Of all these books he

only finished the first, the treatise on grammar. The others were only

summaries, and are now lost. On the other hand, we have still the six

books on music, likewise begun at Milan, which he finished, almost as an

amusement, at Thagaste. They are dialogues between himself and his pupil,

the poet Licentius, upon metre and scansion. But we know from himself that

he intended to make this book longer, and to write a second part upon

melody, that is to say, music, properly so called. He never found the time:

"Once," he says, "the burthen of ecclesiastical affairs was placed on my

shoulders, \_all these pleasant things\_ slipped from my hands."

Thus, the monk Augustin only rests from prayer and meditation to study

music and poetry. He has thought it necessary to excuse himself. "In all

that," says he, "I had but one purpose. For, as I did not wish to pluck

away too suddenly either young men, or those of another age, on whom God

had bestowed good wits, from ideas of the senses and carnal literature,

\_things it is very hard for them not to be attached to\_, I have tried

by reasoning lessons to turn them little by little, and by the love of

unchanging truth, to attach them to God, sole master of all things.... He

who reads these books will see that if I have touched upon the poets and

grammarians, 'twas more by the exigency of the journey than by any desire

to settle among them.... Such is the life I have chosen to walk with the

feeble, not being very strong myself, rather than to hurl myself out on the

void with wings still half-fledged...."

Here again, how human all that is, and wise--yes, and modest too. Augustin

has no whit of the fanatic about him. No straighter conscience than his,

or even more persistent in uprooting error. But he knows what man is, that

life here below is a voyage among other men weak as himself, and he fits in

with the needs of the voyage. Oh, yes, no doubt, for the Christian who has

arrived at supreme renunciation--what is poetry, what is knowledge, "what

is everything that is not eternal?" But this carnal literature and science

are so many steps of a height proportionate to our feebleness, to lead

us imperceptibly to the conceptual world. As a prudent guide of souls,

Augustin did not wish to make the ascent too rapidly. As for music, he has

still more indulgence for that than for any of the other arts, for "it

is by sounds that we best perceive the power of numbers in every variety

of movement, and their study thus leads us gradually to the closest and

highest secrets of truth, and discovers to those who love and seek it

the divine Wisdom and Providence in all things...." He is always coming

back to it--to this music he loves so much; he comes back to it in spite

of himself. Later, in great severity, he will reproach himself for the

pleasure he takes in the liturgical chants, but nevertheless the old

instinct will remain. He was born a musician. He will remain one to his

last gasp.

If he did not break completely with profane art and letters at this present

moment of his life, his chief reasons were of a practical order. Still

another object may be discerned in these educational treatises--namely, to

prove to the pagans that one may be a Christian and yet not be a barbarian

and ignorant. Augustin's position in front of his adversaries is very

strong indeed. None of them can attempt to cope with him either in breadth

of knowledge, or in happy versatility, or in plenitude of intellectual

gifts. He had the entire heritage of the ancient world between his hands.

Well might he say to the pagans: "What you admire in your orators and

philosophers, I have made my own. Behold it! On my lips recognize the

accent of your orators.... Well, all that, which you deem so high, I

despise. The knowledge of this world is nothing without the wisdom of

Christ."

Of course, Augustin has paid the price of this all-round knowledge--too

far-reaching, perhaps, at certain points. He has often too much paraded his

knowledge, his dialectic and oratorical talents. What matters that, if even

in this excess he aims solely at the welfare of souls--to edify them and

set them aglow with the fire of his charity? At Thagaste, he disputes with

his brethren, with his son Adeodatus. He is always the master--he knows it;

but what humility he puts into this dangerous part! The conclusion of his

book, \_The Master\_, which he wrote then, is that all the words of him who

teaches are useless, if the hidden Master reveal not the truth to him who

listens.

So, under his ungainly monk's habit, he continues his profession of

rhetorician. He has come to Thagaste with the intention of retiring from

the world and living in God; and here he is disputing, lecturing, writing

more than ever. The world pursues him and occupies him even in his retreat.

He says to himself that down there at Rome, at Carthage, at Hippo, there

are men speaking in the forums or in the basilicas, whispering in secret

meetings, seducing poor souls defenceless against error. These impostors

must be immediately unmasked, confounded, reduced to silence. With all his

heart Augustin throws himself into this work at which he excels. Above all,

he attacks his old friends the Manichees.... He wrote many tracts against

them. From the animosity he put into these, may be judged to what extent

Manicheeism filled his thoughts, and also the progress of the sect in

Africa.

This campaign was even the cause of a complete change in his way of

writing. With the object of reaching the plainest sort of people, he began

to employ the popular language, not recoiling before a solecism, when the

solecism appeared to him indispensable to explain his thought. This must

have been a cruel mortification for him. In his very latest writings he

made a point of shewing that no elegance of language was unknown to him.

But his real originality is not in that. When he writes the fine style,

his period is heavy, entangled, often obscure. On the other hand, nothing

is more lively, clear and coloured, and, as we say to-day, more direct,

than the familiar language of his sermons and certain of his treatises.

This language he has really created. He wanted to clarify, comment, give

details, and he felt how awkward classical Latin is to decompose ideas

and render shades. And so, in a popular Latin, already very close to the

Romance languages, he has thrown out the plan of analytical prose, the

instrument of thought of the modern West.

Not only did he battle against the heretics, but his restless friendship

continually scaled the walls of his cell to fly to the absent ones dear

to his heart. He feels that he must expand to his friends, and make them

sharers in his meditations: this nervous man, in poor health, spends a part

of his nights meditating. The argument he has hit upon in last night's

insomnia--his friends must be told that! He heaps his letters on them. He

writes to Nebridius, to Romanianus, to Paulinus of Nola; to people unknown

and celebrated, in Africa, Italy, Spain, and Palestine. A time will come

when his letters will be real encyclicals, read throughout Christendom. He

writes so much that he is often short of paper. He has not tablets enough

to put down his notes. He asks Romanianus to give him some. His beautiful

tablets, the ivory ones, are used up; he has used the last one for a

ceremonial letter, and he asks his friend's pardon for writing to him on

a wretched bit of vellum.

Besides all that, he interests himself in the affairs of his

fellow-townsmen. Augustin is a personage at Thagaste. The good folk of the

free-town are well aware that he is eloquent, that he has a far-reaching

acquaintance, and that he has great influence in high quarters. They

ask for his protection and his interference. It is even possible that

they obliged him to defend them in the courts. They were proud of their

Augustin. And as they were afraid that some neighbouring town might steal

away their great man, they kept a guard round his house. They prevented him

from shewing himself too much in the neighbourhood. Augustin himself agreed

with this, and lived retired as far as he could, for he was afraid they

would make him a bishop or priest in spite of himself. In those days that

was a danger incurred by all Christians who were rich or had talent. The

rich gave their goods to the poor when they took orders. The men of talent

defended the interests of the community, or attracted opulent benefactors.

And because of all these reasons, the needy or badly managed churches

stalked as a prey the celebrated Augustin.

In spite of this supervision, this unremitting rush of business, the work

of all kinds which he undertook, he experienced at Thagaste a peace which

he was never to find again. One might say that he pauses and gathers

together all his strength before the great exhausting labour of his

apostolate. In this Numidian country, so verdant and cool, where a thousand

memories of childhood encompassed him, where he was not able to take a step

without encountering the ever-living image of his mother, he soared towards

God with more confidence. He who sought in the things of sense ladder-rungs

whereby to mount to spiritual realities, still turned kindly eyes on

the natural scene. From the windows of his room he saw the forest pines

rounding their heads, like little crystal goblets with stems slim and thin.

His scarred chest breathed in deliriously the resinous breath of the fine

trees. He listened like a musician to the orchestra of birds. The changing

scenes of country life always attracted him. It is now that he wrote:

"Tell me, does not the nightingale seem to you to modulate her voice

delightfully? Is not her song, so harmonious, so suave, so well attuned to

the season, the very voice of the spring?..."

IV

AUGUSTIN A PRIEST

This halt did not last long. Soon was going to begin for Augustin the time

of tribulation, that of his struggles and apostolic journeys.

And first, he must mourn his son Adeodatus, that young man who seemed

destined to such great things. It is indeed most probable that the young

monk died at Thagaste during the three years that his father spent there.

Augustin was deeply grieved; but, as in the case of his mother's death, he

mastered his sorrow by all the force of his Christian hope. No doubt he

loved his son as much as he was proud of him. It will be remembered what

words he used to speak of this youthful genius, whose precocity frightened

him. Little by little his grief quietened down, and in its place came a

mild resignation. Some years later he will write about Adeodatus: "Lord,

early didst Thou cut off his life from this earth, but I remember him

without a shadow of misgiving. My remembrance is not mixed with any fear

for his boyhood, or the youth he was, or the man he would have been." No

fear! What a difference between this and the habitual feelings of the

Jansenists, who believed themselves his disciples! While Augustin thinks of

his son's death with a calm and grave joy which he can scarce hide, those

of Port Royal could only think in trembling of the judgment of God. Their

faith did not much resemble the luminous and confident faith of Augustin.

For him, salvation is the conquest of joy.

At Thagaste he lived in joy. Every morning in awaking before the forest

pines, glistening with the dews of the morning, he might well say with a

full heart: "My God, give me the grace to live here under the shades of Thy

peace, while awaiting that of Thy Paradise." But the Christians continued

to watch him. It was to the interest of a number of people that this light

should not be hid under a bushel. Perhaps a snare was deliberately laid for

him. At any rate, he was imprudent enough to come out of his retreat and

travel to Hippo. He thought he might be safe there, because, as the town

had a bishop already, they would not have any excuse to get him consecrated

in spite of himself.

An inhabitant of Hippo, a clerk of the Imperial Ministry of the Interior,

begged his spiritual assistance. Doubts, he maintained, still delayed him

on the way to an entire conversion. Augustin alone could help him to get

clear of them. So Augustin, counting already on a new recruit for the

Thagaste monastery, went over there at the request of this official.

Now, if there was a bishop at Hippo (a certain Valerius), priests were

lacking. Furthermore, Valerius was getting on in years. Originally Greek,

he knew Latin badly, and not a word of Punic--a great hindrance for him in

his duties of judge, administrator, and catechist. The knowledge of the two

languages was indispensable to an ecclesiastic in such a country, where the

majority of the rural population spoke only the old Carthaginian idiom.

All this proves to us that Catholicism was in bad shape in the diocese

of Hippo. Not only was there a lack of priests, but the bishop was a

foreigner, little familiar with African customs. There was a general

demand for a native to take his place--one young, active, and well enough

furnished with learning to hold his own against the heretics and the

schismatics of the party of Donatus, and also sufficiently able to watch

over the interests of the Church at Hippo, and above all, to make it

prosperous. Let us not forget that at this time, in the eyes of a crowd of

poor wretches, Christianity was first and foremost the religion which gave

out bread. Even in those early days, the Church did its best to solve the

eternal social question.

While Augustin was at Hippo, Valerius preached a sermon in the basilica in

which, precisely, he deplored this lack of priests the community suffered

from. Mingled with the congregation, Augustin listened, sure that he would

be unrecognized. But the secret of his presence had leaked out. People

pointed to him while the bishop was preaching. The next thing was that some

furious enthusiasts seized hold of him and dragged him to the foot of the

episcopal chair, yelling:

"Augustin a priest! Augustin a priest!"

Such were the democratic ways of the Church in those days. The

inconveniences are plain enough. What is certain is, that if Augustin had

resisted, he might have lost his life, and that the bishop would have

provoked a riot in refusing him the priesthood. In Africa, religious

passions are not to be trifled with, especially when they are exasperated

by questions of profit or politics. In his heart, the bishop was delighted

with this brutal capture which gained him the distinction of such a

well-known fellow-worker. There and then he ordained the Thagaste monk. And

so, as Augustin's pupil, Possidius, the future Bishop of Guelma, puts it,

"This shining lamp, which sought the darkness of solitude, was placed upon

the lamp-stand..." Augustin, who saw the finger of God in this adventure,

submitted to the popular will. Nevertheless, he was in despair, and he

wept at the change they were forcing on him. Then, some of those present,

mistaking the significance of his tears, said to console him:

"Yes, you are right. The priesthood is not good enough for your merits. But

you may be certain that you will be our bishop."

Augustin well knew all that the crowd meant by that, and what it expected

of its bishop. He who only thought of leaving the world, grew frightened

at the practical cares he would have to take over. And the spiritual side

of his jurisdiction frightened him no less. To speak of God! Proclaim the

word of God! He deemed himself unworthy of so high a privilege. He was so

ill-prepared! To remedy this fault of preparation, as well as he could, he

desired that he might be given a little leisure till the following Easter.

In a letter addressed to Valerius, and no doubt intended to be made public,

he humbly set forth the reasons why he asked for delay. They were so

apposite and so creditable, that very likely the bishop yielded. The new

priest received permission to retire to a country house near Hippo. His

flock, who did not feel at all sure of their shepherd, would not have let

him go too far off.

He took up his duties as soon as possible. Little by little he became,

to all intents, the coadjutor of the bishop, who charged him with the

preaching and the baptism of catechumens. These were the two most important

among the episcopal prerogatives. The bishops made a point of doing these

things themselves. Certain colleagues of Valerius even grew scandalized

that he should allow a simple priest to preach before him in his own

church. But soon other bishops, struck by the advantages of this

innovation, followed the example of Valerius, and allowed their clerks to

preach even in their presence. The priest of Hippo did not lose his head

among so many honours. He felt chiefly the perils of them, and he regarded

them as a trial sent by God. "I have been forced into this," he said,

"doubtless in punishment of my sins; for from what other motive can I think

that the second place at the helm should be given to me--to me who do not

even know how to hold an oar...."

Meanwhile, he had not relinquished his purpose of monastic life. Though

a priest, he meant to remain a monk. It was heart-breaking for him to be

obliged to leave his monastery at Thagaste. He spoke of his regret to

Valerius, who, perceiving the usefulness of a convent as a seminary for

future priests, gave him an orchard belonging to the church of Hippo, that

he might found a new community there. So was established the monastery

which was going to supply a great number of clerks and bishops to all the

African provinces.

Among the ruins of Hippo, that old Roman and Phoenician city, they search

for the place where Augustin's monastery stood, without much hope of ever

finding it. Some have thought to locate it upon that hill where the water

brought from the near mountains by an aqueduct used to pour into immense

reservoirs, and where to-day rises a new basilica which attracts all eyes

out at sea. Behind the basilica is a convent where the Little Sisters of

the Poor lodge about a hundred old people. So is maintained among the

African Mussulmans the remembrance of the grand Christian \_marabout\_. One

might possibly wish to see there a building more in the pure and quiet

taste of antiquity. But after all, the piety of the intention is enough.

This hospital serves admirably to call up the memory of the illustrious

bishop who was charity itself. As for the basilica, Africa has done all she

can to make it worthy of him. She has given her most precious marbles, and

one of her fairest landscapes as a frame.

It is chiefly in the evening, in the closing dusk, that this landscape

reveals all its special charm and its finer values. The roseate glow of the

setting sun throws into sharp relief the black profile of the mountains,

which command the Seybouse valley. Under the mustering shadows, the pallid

river winds slowly to the sea. The gulf, stretching limitless, shines like

a slab of salt strangely bespangled. In this atmosphere without mists, the

sharp outlines of the coast, the dense movelessness of the aspect, has an

indescribable effect. It is like a hitherto unknown and virginal revelation

of the earth. Then the stars bloom out, with a flame, an hallucinating

palpability. Charles's Wain, burning low on the gorges of the Edough, seems

like a golden waggon rolling through the fields of Heaven. A deep peace

settles upon farmland and meadow country, only broken by a watch-dog's bark

now and then....

But it matters not which spot is chosen in the surroundings of Hippo to

place Augustin's monastery, the view will be equally beautiful. From all

parts of the plain, mounded by heaps of ruins, the sea can be seen--a wide

bay circled in soft bland curves, like at Naples. All around, an arena of

mountains--the green ravines of the Edough and its wooded slopes. Along the

surbased roads rise the great sonorous pines, and through them wanders the

æolian complaint of the sea-winds. Blue of the sea, blue of the sky, noble

foliage of Italy's ancient groves--it is one of Lamartine's landscapes

under a more burning sun. The gaiety of the mornings there is a physical

luxury for heart and eyes, when the new-born light laughs upon the painted

cupolas of the houses, and dark blue veils float between the walls, glaring

white, of the steep streets.

Among the olives and orange-trees of Hippo, Augustin must have seen happy

days pass by, as at Thagaste. The rule he had given the convent, which he

himself obeyed like any one else, was neither too slack nor too strict--in

a word, such as it should be for men who have lived in the culture of

letters and works of the mind. There was no affectation of excessive

austerity. Augustin and his monks wore very simple clothes and shoes, but

suitable for a bishop and his clerks. Like laymen, they wore the byrrhus,

a garment with a hood, which seems very like the ancestor of the Arab

burnous. To keep an even line between daintiness and negligence in costume,

to have no exaggeration in anything, is what Augustin aimed at. The poet

Rutilius Numatianus, who about that time was attacking the sordid and

culture-hating monks with sombre irony, would have had a chance to admire

a restraint and decorum in the Hippo monastery which recalled what was

best in the manners of the ancient world. At table, a like moderation.

Vegetables were generally provided, and sometimes meat when any one

was sick, or guests arrived. They drank a little wine, contrary to the

regulations of St. Jerome, who condemned wine as a drink for devils. When

a monk infringed the rule, his share of the wine was stopped.

Through some remains of fastidious habits in Augustin, or perhaps because

he had nothing else, the table service he used himself was silver. On the

other hand, the pots and dishes were of earthenware, or wood, or common

alabaster. Augustin, who was very temperate in eating and drinking, seemed

at table to pay attention only to what was being read or talked about.

He cared very little what he ate, provided the food was not a stimulant

to lubricity. He used to say to those Christians who paraded a Pharisaic

severity: "It is the pure heart which makes pure food." Then, with his

constant desire for charity, he prohibited all spiteful gossip in the

conversation in the refectory. In those times of religious struggle, the

clerics ferociously blackened each other's characters. Augustin caused to

have written on the walls a distich, which ran thus:

"He who takes pleasure in slandering the life of the absent,

Should know he is unworthy to sit at this table."

"One day," says Possidius, "some of his intimate friends, even other

bishops, having forgotten this sentence, he reproached them warmly, and

very much perturbed, he cried out that he was going to remove those verses

from the refectory, or rise from table and withdraw to his cell. I was

present with many others when this happened."

It was not only slanderous talk or interior dissensions which troubled

Augustin's peace of mind. He combined the duties of priest, of a head of

a convent, and of an apostle. He had to preach, instruct the catechumens,

battle against the disaffected. The town of Hippo was very unruly, full

of heretics, schismatics, pagans. Those of the party of Donatus were

triumphant, driving the Catholics from their churches and lands. When

Augustin came into the country, Catholicism was very low. And then the

ineradicable Manichees continued to recruit proselytes. He never stopped

writing tracts, disputing against them, overwhelming them under the close

logic of his arguments. At the request of the Donatists themselves, he had

an argument with one of their priests, a certain Fortunatus, in the baths

of Sossius at Hippo. He reduced this man to silence and to flight. Not in

the least discouraged were the Manichees: they sent another priest.

If the enemies of the Church shewed themselves stubborn, Augustin's own

congregation were singularly turbulent, hard to manage. The weakness of old

Valerius must have allowed a good many abuses to creep into the community.

Ere long the priest of Hippo had a foretaste of the difficulties which

awaited him as bishop.

Following the example of Ambrose, he undertook to abolish the custom

of feasts in the basilicas and on the tombs of the martyrs. This was a

survival of paganism, of which the festivals included gluttonous eating and

orgies. At every solemnity, and they were frequent, the pagans ate in the

courts and under the porticoes around the temples. In Africa, above all,

these public repasts gave an opportunity for repugnant scenes of stuffing

and drunkenness. As a rule, the African is very sober; but when he does let

himself go he is terrible. This is quite easily seen to-day, in the great

Muslem feasts, when the rich distribute broken bits of meat to the poor of

their district. As soon as these people, used to drink water and to eat a

little boiled rice, have tasted meat, or drunk only one cup of wine, there

is no holding them: there are fights, stabbing matches, a general brawl

in the hovels. Just picture this popular debauch in full blast in the

cemeteries and the courts of the basilicas, and it will be understood why

Augustin did his best to put an end to such scandals.

For this purpose, he joined hands first of all with his bishop, Valerius,

and then with the Primate of Carthage, Aurelius, who shall be henceforth

his firmest support in his struggle against the schismatics.

During Lent, the subject fitting in naturally with the season, he

spoke against these pagan orgies; and this gave rise to a good deal of

discontent, outside. Easter went by without trouble. But the day after the

Ascension, the people of Hippo were used to celebrate what they called "the

Joy-day," by a traditional good feed and drink. The day before, which was

the religious festival, Augustin intrepidly spoke against "the Joy-day."

They interrupted the preacher. Some of them shouted that as much was done

at Rome in St. Peter's basilica. At Carthage, they danced round the tomb of

St. Cyprian. To the shrilling of flutes, amid the dull blows of the gongs,

mimes gave themselves up to obscene contortions, while the spectators

sang to the clapping of their hands.... Augustin knew all about that.

He declared that these abominations might have been tolerated in former

times so as not to discourage the pagans from becoming converts; but that

henceforth the people, altogether Christian, should give them up. In the

end, he spoke with such touching eloquence that the audience burst into

tears. He believed he had won.

The next day it was all to do over again. Agitators had worked among the

crowd to such an extent that a riot was feared. Nevertheless, Augustin,

preceded by his bishop, entered the basilica at the hour of service. At the

same moment the Donatists were banqueting in their church, which was quite

near. Through the walls of their own church the Catholics heard the noise

of this carouse. It required the coadjutor's most urgent remonstrances to

keep them from imitating their neighbours. The last murmurs died down, and

the ceremony ended with the singing of the sacred hymns.

Augustin had carried the position. But the conflict had got to the point

that he had to threaten the people with his resignation, and, as he wrote

to Alypius, "to shake out on them the dust from his clothes." All this

promised very ill for the future. He who already considered the priesthood

as a trial, saw with terror the bishopric drawing near.

THE FIFTH PART

THE APOSTLE OF PEACE AND OF CATHOLIC UNITY

Dic eis ista, ut plorent ... et sic eos rape tecum ad Deum: quia de

spiritu ejus haec dicis eis, si dicis ardens igne caritatis.

"Tell them this, O my soul, that they may weep ... and thus carry them

up with thyself to God; because by His Spirit thou sayest these things,

if Thou speakest burning with the flame of charity."

\_Confessions\_, IV, 12.

I

THE BISHOP OF HIPPO

In his monastery, Augustin was still spied upon by the neighbouring

Churches, who wanted him for their bishop. They would capture him on the

first opportunity. The old Valerius, fearing his priest would be taken

unawares, urged him to hide himself. But he knew by the very case of

Augustin, forced into the priesthood in spite of himself, that the greatest

precautions are useless against those determined to gain their ends by any

means. It would be safest to anticipate the danger.

He determined therefore to share the bishopric with Augustin, to have him

consecrated during his own lifetime, and to indicate him as his successor.

This was against the African usage, and what was more, against the Canons

of the Council of Nice--though it is true that Valerius, like Augustin

himself, was unaware of this latter point. But surely the rule could be

waived in view of the exceptional merits of the priest of Hippo. The old

bishop began by sounding Aurelius, the Primate of Carthage, and when he was

satisfied as to the agreement and support of this high personage, he took

the opportunity of a religious solemnity to make known his intentions to

the people.

Some of the neighbouring bishops--Megalius, Bishop of Guelma and Primate of

Numidia, among them--being gathered at Hippo to consecrate a new bishop,

Valerius announced publicly in the basilica that he wished Augustin to be

consecrated at the same ceremony. This had been the wish of his people

for a long time. Really, in demanding this honour for his priest, the old

bishop did no more than follow the wish of the public. Immediately, his

words were received with cheers. The faithful with loud shouts demanded

Augustin's consecration.

Megalius alone objected. He even made himself the voice of certain

calumnies, so as to have the candidate put aside as unworthy. There is

nothing astonishing in such an attitude. This Megalius was old (he died a

short time after), and, like all old men, he took the gloomiest view of

innovations. Already, in the face of settled custom, had Valerius granted

Augustin the right to preach in his presence. And see now, by a new

sinking, he was attempting to place two bishops at once in the see of

Hippo! Whatever this young priest's talents might be, enough, had been

done for him--a recent convert into the bargain, and, what was still more

serious, a refugee from the Manicheans. What was not related about the

abominations committed in the mysteries of those people? Just how far had

Augustin dipped into them? They snarled against him everywhere at Hippo,

and at Carthage too, where he had compromised himself by his excessive

zeal; Catholics and Donatists alike gossiped. Megalius, a punctilious

defender of discipline and the hierarchy, no doubt gathered up these

malevolent rumours with pleasure. He used them as an excuse for making

Augustin mark time, so to speak. Commonplace people always feel a secret

delight in humiliating to the common rule those whom they can feel are

beings of a different quality from themselves.

One of the slanders set abroad about Valerius' priest, Megalius seems to

have believed. He allowed himself to be persuaded that Augustin had given

a philtre to a woman, one of his penitents, whom he wished to possess. It

was then the fashion among the pious to exchange \_eulogies\_, or bits of

holy bread, to signify a spiritual communion. Augustin was said to have

mixed certain magic potions with some of these breads and offered them

hypocritically to the woman he was in love with. This accusation started a

big scandal, and the remembrance of it persisted long, because five or six

years later the Donatist Petilian was still repeating it.

Augustin cleared himself victoriously. Megalius avowed his mistake. He did

better: not only did he apologize to him he had slandered, but he solemnly

asked forgiveness from his fellow-bishops for having misled them upon false

rumours. It is probable that some time during the inquiry he had got to

know Valerius' coadjutor better. Augustin's charm, taken with the austerity

of his life, acted upon the vexed old man and altered his views. Be that

so or not, it was at any rate by Megalius, Bishop of Guelma and Primate of

Numidia, that Augustin was consecrated Bishop of Hippo.

He was in consternation over his rise. He has said it again and again. We

may take his word for it. Yet the honours and advantages of the episcopate

were then so considerable that his enemies were able to describe him as an

ambitious man. Nothing could agree less with his character. In his heart,

Augustin only wished to live in quiet. Since his retreat at Cassicium,

fortune he had given up, as well as literary glory. His sole wish was to

live in pondering the divine truths, and to draw nearer to God. \_Videte et

gustate quam mitis sit Dominus\_--"O taste and see that the Lord is good."

This perhaps, of the whole Bible, is the verse he liked best, which

answered best to the close desire of his soul; and he quotes it oftenest

in his sermons. Then, to study the Holy Writings, scan the least syllables

of them, since all truth lies there--well, a whole life is not too much

for such labour as that! And to do it, one should sever all ties with the

world, take refuge forbiddingly in the cloister.

But this sincere Christian analysed himself too skilfully not to perceive

that he had a dangerous tendency to isolation. He took too much pleasure

in cutting himself off from the society of mankind to enshroud himself

in study and meditation. He who acknowledged a secret tendency to the

Epicurean indolence--was he going to live a life of the dilettante and the

self-indulgent under cover of holiness? Alone could action save him from

selfishness. Others doubtless fulfilled the laws of charity in praying,

in mortifying themselves for their brethren. But when, like him, a man

has exceptional faculties of persuasion and eloquence, such vigour in

dialectics, such widespread culture, such power to bring to naught the

wrong--would it not be insulting to God to let such gifts lie idle, and a

serious failure in charity to deprive his brethren of the support of such

an engine?

Besides that, he well knew that no man draws near to truth without a

purified heart. Might not his passions, which were so violent, begin to

torment him again after this respite with greater frenzy than before his

conversion? Against that, too, action was the main antidote. In the duties

of the bishopric he saw a means of asceticism--a kind of courageous

purification. He would load himself of his own will with so many anxieties

and so much work that he would have no time left to listen to the insidious

voice of his "old friends." Could he manage to silence them at once?

This unheard-of grace--would it be granted to him? Or would not rather

the struggle continue in the depths of his conscience? What comes out as

certain is that those terrible passions which turned his youth upside down,

nevermore play any part in his life. From the moment he fell on his knees

under the fig-tree at Milan, his sinful heart is a dead heart. He has been

freed from almost all the weaknesses of the old nature, not only from its

vices and carnal affections, but from its most pardonable lapses--save,

perhaps, some old sediment of intellectual and literary vanity.

His books, at the first glance, shew us him no more save as the doctor, and

already the saint. What is seen at once is an entirely bare intelligence,

an entirely pure heart, fired only by the divine love. And yet the

affectionate and tender heart which his had been, always warms his

discussions and his most abstract exegesis. It does not take long to feel

the heat of them, the power of pouring forth emotion. Augustin takes no

heed of that. Of himself he no longer thinks; he no longer belongs to

himself. If he has accepted the episcopate, it is so as to give himself

altogether to the Church, to be all things to all men. He is the man-word,

the man-pen, the sounding-board of the truth. He becomes the man of the

miserable crowds which the Saviour covered with His pity. He is theirs, to

convince them and cure them of their errors. He is a machine which works

without ever stopping for the greater glory of Christ. Bishop, pastor,

leader of souls--he has no desire for anything else.

But it was a heavy labour for this intellectual, who till then had lived

only among books and ideas. The day after his consecration, he must have

regarded it with more terror than ever. During his nights of insomnia, or

at the recreation hour in the monastery garden, he thought over it with

great distress. His eyes wide open in the darkness of his cell, he sought

to define a theory upon the nature and origin of the soul; or else, at the

fall of day, he saw between the olive branches "the sea put on fluctuating

shades like veils of a thousand colours, sometimes green, a green of

infinite tints; sometimes purple; blue sometimes...." And his soul, easily

stirred to poetry, at once arose from these material splendours to the

invisible region of ideas. Then, immediately, he caught himself up: it

was not a question of all that! He said to himself that he was henceforth

the bishop Augustin, that he had charge of souls, that he must work for

the needs of his flock. He would have to struggle in a combat without a

moment's respite. Thereupon he arranged his plans of attack and defence.

With a single glance he gauged the huge work before him.

A crushing work, truly! He was Bishop of Hippo, but a bishop almost without

a flock, in comparison with the rival community of Donatists. The bishop of

the dissentients, Proculeianus, boasted that he was the true representative

of orthodoxy, and as he had on his side the advantage of numbers, he

certainly cut a much greater figure in the town than the successor of

Valerius, with all his knowledge and all his eloquence. The schismatics'

church, as we have seen, was quite near the Catholic church. Their noise

interfered with Augustin's sermons. Possibly the situation had become

slightly better in Hippo since the edict of Theodosius. But it was not so

long ago that those of the Donatist party had the upper hand. A little

before the arrival of the new bishop, the Donatist clergy forbade their

faithful to bake bread for Catholics. A fanatical baker had even refused a

Catholic deacon who was his landlord. These schismatics believed themselves

strong enough to put those who did not belong to them under interdict.

The rout of Catholicism appeared to be an accomplished fact from one end to

the other of Africa. Quite recently a mere fraction of the Donatist party

had been able to send three hundred and ten bishops to the Council of

Bagai, who were to judge the recalcitrants of their own sect. Among these

bishops, the terrible Optatus of Thimgad became marked on account of his

bloody zeal, rambling round Numidia and even the Proconsulate at the head

of armed bands, burning farms and villas, rebaptizing the Catholics by main

force, spreading terror on all sides.

Augustin knew all this, and when he sought help from the local authorities

he was obliged to acknowledge sadly that there was no support to be

expected from Count Gildo, who had tyrannized over Carthage and Africa for

nearly ten years. This Gildo was a native, a Moor, to whom the ministers of

the young Valentinian II had thought it a good stroke of policy to confide

the government of the province. Knowing the weakness of the Empire, the

Moor only thought of cutting out for himself an independent principality

in Africa. He openly favoured Donatism, which was the most numerous and

influential party. The Bishop of Thimgad, Optatus, swore only by him,

regarding him as his master and his "god." In consequence, he was called

"the Gildonian."

Against such enemies, the Imperial authority could only act irregularly.

Augustin was well aware of it. He knew that the Western Empire was in a

critical position. Theodosius had just died, in the midst of war with the

usurper Eugenius. The Barbarians, who made up the greater part of the Roman

armies, shewed themselves more and more threatening. Alaric, entrenched

in the Peloponnesus, was getting ready to invade Italy. However, the

all-powerful minister of the young Honorius, the half-Barbarian Stilicho,

did his best to conciliate the Catholics, and assured them that he would

continue the protection they had had from Theodosius, Augustin therefore

turned to the central power. It alone could bring about a little order in

the provinces--and then, besides, the new emperors were firmly attached

to the defence of Catholicism. The Catholic Bishop of Hippo did his

best, accordingly, to keep on good terms with the representatives of the

Metropolitan Government--the proconsuls; the proprætors; the counts;

and the tribunes, or the secretaries, sent by the Emperor as Government

commissioners.

There was no suspicion of flattery in his attitude, no idolatry of power.

At Milan, Augustin had been near enough to the Court to know what the

Imperial functionaries were worth. Now, he simply adapted himself as well

as he could to the needs of the moment. And with all that, he could have

wished in the depths of his heart that this power were stronger, so as to

give the Church more effective support. This cultured man, brought up in

the respect of the Roman majesty, was by instinct a faithful servant of

the Cæsars. A man who held to authority and tradition, he maintained that

obedience is due to princes: "There is a general agreement," he said,

"of human society to obey its Kings." In one of his sermons he compares

thought, which commands the body, to the Emperor seated upon his throne,

and from the depths of his palace dictating orders which set the whole

Empire moving--a purely ideal image of the sovereign of that time, but one

which pleased his Latin imagination. Alas! Augustin had no illusions about

the effect of Imperial edicts; he knew too well how little they were

regarded, especially in Africa.

So he could hardly count upon Government support for the defence of

Catholic unity and peace. He found he must trust to himself; and all

his strength was in his intelligence, in his charity, in his deeply

compassionate soul. Most earnestly did he wish that Catholicism might be a

religion of love, open to all the nations of the earth, even as its Divine

Founder Himself had wished. A glowing and dominating intelligence, charity

which never tired--those were Augustin's arms. And they were enough. These

qualities gave him an overwhelming superiority over all the men of his

time. Among them, pagans or Christians, he looks like a colossus. From what

a height he crushes, not only the professors who had been his colleagues,

such as Nectarius of Guelma or Maximus of Madaura, but the most celebrated

writers of his time--Symmachus, for instance, and Ammianus Marcellinus.

After reading a treatise of Augustin's, one is astounded by the

intellectual meagreness of these last pagans. The narrowness of their

mind and platitude of thought is a thing that leaves one aghast. Even the

illustrious Apuleius, who belonged to the golden age of African literature,

the author of \_The Doctrine of Plato\_, praises philosophy and the Supreme

Being in terms which recall the professions of faith of the chemist and

druggist, Homais, in \_Madame Bovary\_.

Nor among those who surrounded Augustin, his fellow-bishops, was there one

fit to be compared with him, even at a distance. Except perhaps Nebridius,

his dearest friends, Alypius, Severus, or Evodius, are merely disciples,

not to say servants of his thought. Aurelius, Primate of Carthage, an

energetic administrator, a firm and upright character, if he is not on

Augustin's level, is at any rate capable of understanding and supporting

him. The others are decent men, like that Samsucius, Bishop of Tours, very

nearly illiterate, but full of good sense and experience, and on this

ground consulted respectfully by his colleague of Hippo. Or else they are

plotters, given to debauch, engaged in business, like Paulus, Bishop of

Cataqua, who became involved in risky speculations, swindled the revenue,

and by his expensive way of life ruined his diocese. Others, on the

Donatist side, are mere swashbucklers, half-brigands, half-fanatics, like

the Gildonian Optatus, Bishop of Thimgad, a manifestation in advance of

the Mussulman \_marabout\_ who preached the holy war against the Catholics,

raiding, killing, burning, converting by sabre blows and bludgeoning.

Amid these insignificant or violent men, Augustin will endeavour to realize

to the full the admirable type of bishop, at once spiritual father,

protector, and support of his people. He had promised himself to sacrifice

no whit of his ideal of Christian perfection. As bishop, he will remain a

monk, as he did during his priesthood. Beside the monastery established in

Valerius' garden, where it is impossible to receive properly his guests and

visitors, he will start another in the episcopal residence. He will conform

to the monastic rule as far as his duties allow. He will pray, study the

Scriptures, define dogmas, refute heresies. At the same time, he means to

neglect nothing of his material work. He has mouths to feed, property to

look after, law-cases to examine. He will labour at all that. For this

mystic and theorist it means a never-ceasing immolation.

First, to give the poor their daily bread. Like all the communities of that

time, Hippo maintained a population of beggars. Often enough, the diocesan

cash-box was empty. Augustin was obliged to hold out the hand, to deliver

from the height of his pulpit pathetic appeals for charity. Then, there are

hospitals to be built for the sick, a lodging-house for poor wanderers.

The bishop started these institutions in houses bequeathed to the church

of Hippo. For reasons of economy, he thought better not to build. That

would overload his budget. Next came the greatest of all his cares--the

administration of Church property. To increase this property, he stipulated

that his clergy should give up all they possessed in favour of the

community, thus giving the faithful an example of voluntary poverty.

He also accepted gifts from private persons. But he also often refused

these--for example, the bequest of a father or mother, who, in a moment of

anger, disinherited their children. He did not wish to profit by the bad

feelings of parents to plunder orphans. On another side, he objected to

engage the Church in suits at law with the exchequer upon receiving certain

heritages. When a business man at Hippo left to the diocese his share of

profits in the service of boats for carrying Government stores, Augustin

came to the conclusion that it would be better to refuse. In case of

shipwreck, they would be obliged to make good the lost corn to the

Treasury, or else to put the captain and surviving sailors to the torture

to prove that the crew was not responsible for the loss of the ship.

Augustin would not hear tell of it.

"Is it fit," he said, "that a bishop should be a shipowner?... A bishop

a torturer? Oh, no; that does not agree at all with a servant of Jesus

Christ."

The people of Hippo did not share his views. They blamed Augustin's

scruples. They accused him of compromising the interests of the Church. One

day he had to explain himself from the pulpit:

"Well I know, my brothers, that you often say between yourselves: 'Why do

not people give anything to the Church of Hippo? Why do not the dying make

it their heir? The reason is that Bishop Augustin is too easy; he gives all

back to the children; he keeps nothing!' I acknowledge it, I only accept

gifts which are good and pious. Whoever disinherits his son to make the

Church his heir, let him find somebody willing to accept his gifts. It is

not I who will do it, and by God's grace, I hope it will not be anybody....

Yes, I have refused many legacies, but I have also accepted many. Need I

name them to you? I will give only one instance. I accepted the heritage of

Julian. Why? Because he died without children...."

The listeners thought that their bishop really put too fine a point on

things.

They further reproached him with not knowing how to attract and flatter the

rich benefactors. Augustin would not allow, either, that they had any right

to force a passing stranger to receive the priesthood and consequently to

give up his goods to the poor. All this really was very wise, not only

according to the spirit of the Gospel, but according to human prudence.

If Augustin, for the sake of the good fame of his Church, did not wish to

incur the accusation of grasping and avarice, he dreaded nothing so much

as a law-case. To accept lightly the gifts and legacies offered was to lay

himself open to expensive pettifogging. Far better to refuse than to lose

both his money and reputation. So were reconciled, in this man of prayer

and meditation, practical good sense with the high disinterestedness of the

Christian teaching.

The bishop was disinterested; his people were covetous. The people of those

times wished the Church to grow rich, because they were the first to profit

by its riches. Now these riches were principally in houses and land. The

diocese of Hippo had to deal with many houses and immense \_fundi\_, upon

which lived an entire population of artisans and freed-men, agricultural

labourers, and even art-workers--smelters, embroiderers, chisellers on

metals. Upon the Church lands, these small people were protected from taxes

and the extortions of the revenue officers, and no doubt they found the

episcopal government more fatherly and mild than the civil.

Augustin, who had made a vow of poverty and given his heritage to the poor,

became by a cruel irony a great landowner as soon as he was elected Bishop

of Hippo. Doubtless he had stewards under him to look after the property

of the diocese. This did not save him from going into details of management

and supervising his agents. He heard the complaints, not only of his

own tenants, but also of those who belonged to other estates and were

victimized by dishonest bailiffs. Anyhow, we have a thousand signs to shew

that no detail of country life was unfamiliar to him.

On horseback or muleback, he rode for miles through the country about

Hippo to visit his vineyards and olivets. He examined, found out things,

questioned the workmen, went into the presses and the mills. He knew the

grape good to eat, and the grape to make wine with. He pointed out where

the ensilage pits had been dug in too marshy land, which endangered the

young corn. As a capable landowner he was abreast of the law, careful

about the terms of contracts. He knew the formulas employed for sales or

benefactions. He saw to it that charcoal was buried around the landmarks in

the fields, so that if the post disappeared, its place could be found. And

as he was a poet, he gathered on his course a whole booty of rural images

which later on went to brighten his sermons. He made ingenious comparisons

with the citron-tree, "which is seen to give flowers and fruits all the

year if it be watered constantly," or else with the goat "who gets upon her

two hind legs to crop the bitter leaves of the wild olive."

These journeys in the open air, however tiring they might be, were after

all a rest for his overworked brain. But there was one among his episcopal

duties which wearied him to disgust. Every day he had to listen to parties

in dispute and give judgment. Following recent Imperial legislation, the

bishop became judge in civil cases--a tiresome and endless work in a

country where tricky quibbling raged with obstinate fury. The litigants

pursued Augustin, overran his house, like those fellahs in dirty burnous

who block our law-courts with their rags. In the \_secretarium\_ of the

basilica, or under the portico of the court leading to the church, Augustin

sat like a Mussulman cadi in the court of the mosque.

The emperors had only regulated an old custom of apostolic times in placing

the Christians under the jurisdiction of their bishop. In accordance with

St. Paul's advice, the priests did their utmost to settle differences among

the faithful. Later, when their number had considerably increased, the

Government adopted a system not unlike the "Capitulations" in countries

under the Ottoman suzerainty. Lawsuits between clerics and laymen could not

be equitably judged by civil servants, who were often pagans. Moreover, the

parties based their claims on theological principles or religious laws that

the arbitrator generally knew nothing about. In these conditions, it was

natural enough that the Imperial authority should say to the disputants,

"Fight it out among yourselves".

And it happened, just at the moment when Augustin began to fill the see of

Hippo, that Theodosius broadened still more the judicial prerogatives of

the bishops. The unhappy judge was overwhelmed with law-cases. Every day he

sat till the hour of his meal, and sometimes the whole day when he fasted.

To those who accused him of laziness, he answered:

"I can declare on my soul that if it were question of my own convenience, I

should like much better to work at some manual labour at certain hours of

the day, as the rule is in well-governed monasteries, and have the rest of

the time free to read or pray or meditate upon the Holy Scripture, instead

of being troubled with all the complications and dull talk of lawsuits."

The rascality of the litigants made him indignant. From the pulpit he gave

them advice full of Christian wisdom, but which could not have been much

relished. A suit at law, according to him, was a loss of time and a cause

of sorrow. It would be better to let the opponent have the money, than to

lose time and be filled with uneasiness. Nor was this, added the preacher

in all good faith, to encourage injustice; for the robber would be robbed

in his turn by a greater robber than himself.

These reasons seemed only moderately convincing. The pettifoggers did not

get discouraged. On the contrary, they infested the bishop with their

pleas. As soon as he appeared, they rushed up to him in a mob, surrounded

him, kissed his hand and his shoulder, protesting their respect and

obedience, urging him, constraining him to busy himself about their

affairs. Augustin yielded. But the next day in a vehement sermon he cried

out to them:

\_Discedite a me, maligni!\_--"Go far from me, ye wicked ones, and let me

study in peace the commandments of my God!"

II

WHAT WAS HEARD IN THE BASILICA OF PEACE

Let us try to see Augustin in his pulpit and in his episcopal city.

We cannot do much more than reconstruct them by analogy. Royal Hippo is

utterly gone. Bona, which has taken its place, is about a mile and a half

away, and the fragments which have been dug out of the soil of the dead

city are very inadequate. But Africa is full of Christian ruins, and

chiefly of basilicas. Rome has nothing equal to offer. And that is easily

understood. The Roman basilicas, always living, have been changed in the

course of centuries, and have put on, time after time, the garb forced upon

them by the fashion. Those of Africa have remained just as they were--at

least in their principal lines--on the morrow of the Arab invasion, as

Augustin's eyes had seen them. They are ruins, no doubt, and some very

mutilated, but ruins of which no restoration has altered the plan or

changed the features.

As the traces of Hippo and its church are swept away or deeply buried, we

are obliged, in order to get some approximate idea, to turn towards another

African town which has suffered less from time and devastation. Theveste

with its basilica, the best preserved, the finest and largest in all

Africa, can restore to us a little of the look and colour and atmosphere of

Hippo in those final years of the fourth century.

Ancient Theveste was much larger than the present town, the French Tebessa.

This, even reduced to the perimeter of the Byzantine fortress built under

Justinian, still surprises the traveller by its singularly original aspect.

Amid the wide plains of alfa-grass which surround it, with its quadrangular

enclosure, its roads on the projection of the walls behind the battlements,

its squat turrets, it has a look as archaic, as strange, as our own

Aigues-Mortes amid its marshy fen. Nothing can be more rich and joyous to

the eye than the rust which covers its ruins--a complete gilding that one

would say had been laid on by the hand of man.

It has a little temple which is a wonder and has been compared to the

ancient Roman temple--the \_Maison Carrée\_--at Nîmes. But how much warmer,

more living are the stones! The shafts of the columns, and the pilasters of

the peristyle, barked by time, seem as scaly and full of sap as the trunks

of palm-trees. The carved acanthus-leaves in the capitals of the pillars

droop like bunches of palms reddened by the summer.

Quite near, at the end of a narrow street, lined with modern and squalid

hovels, the triumphal arch of Septimus Severus and of Caracalla extends its

luminous bow; and high above the heavy mass of architecture, resting upon

slim aerial little columns, a buoyant \_ædiculus\_ shines like a coral

tabernacle or a coffer of yellow ivory.

All about, forms in long draperies are huddled. The Numidian burnous has

the whiteness of the toga. It has also the same graceful folds. At the

sight of them you suddenly feel yourself to be in a strange land--carried

back very far across the centuries. No sooner is the vision of antiquity

outlined than it grows firm. Down below there, a horseman, clad in white,

is framed with his white horse in the moulded cincture of a door. He

passes, and upon the white wall of the near tower his shadow rests a

moment, like a bas-relief upon the marble of a frieze.

Beyond the Byzantine enclosure, the basilica, with its minor buildings,

forms another town almost as large as the present Theveste, and also closed

in by a belt of towers and ramparts. One is immediately struck by the

opulent colour of the stones--rose, grown pale and thinner in the sun; and

next, by the solid workmanship and the structural finish. The stones, as

in the Greek temples, are placed on top of one another in regular layers:

the whole holds together by the weight of the blocks and the polish of the

surfaces.

The proportions are on a large scale. There was no grudging for the

buildings, or the materials, or the land. In front of the basilica is a

wide rectangular court bordered with terraces; a portico at the far end;

and in the middle four large fountains to water the walk. A flagged avenue,

closed by two gateways, divides this court from the basilica, properly so

called, which is reached by a staircase between two columns. The staircase

leads to the \_atrium\_ decorated by a Corinthian portico. In the centre

is the font for purifications, a huge monolithic bason in the shape of a

four-leaved clover. Three doors give entrance from the \_atrium\_ to the

basilica, which is divided by rows of green marble columns into three

aisles. The galleries spread out along the side aisles. The floor was in

mosaic. In the apse, behind the altar, stood the bishop's throne.

Around the main building clustered a great number of others: a baptistry;

many chapels (one vaulted in the shape of a three-leaved clover) dedicated,

probably, to local martyrs; a graveyard; a convent with its cells, and its

windows narrow as loop-holes; stables, sheds, and barns. Sheltered within

its walls and towers, amid its gardens and outbuildings, the basilica of

Theveste thus early resembled one of our great monasteries of the Middle

Age, and also in certain ways the great mosques of Islam--the one at

Cordova, or that at Damascus, with their vestibules surrounded by arcades,

their basons for purification, and their walks bordered with orange-trees.

The faithful and the pilgrims were at home there. They might spend the day

stretched upon the flags of the porticoes, in loafing or sleeping in the

blue shade of the columns and the cool of the fountains. In the full sense

of the word, the church was the House of God, open to all.

Very likely the basilicas at Hippo had neither the size nor the splendour

of this one. Nor were there very many. At the time Augustin was ordained

priest, that is to say, when the Donatists had still a majority in the

town, it seems clear that the orthodox community owned but one single

church, the \_Basilica major\_, or Basilica of Peace. Its very name proves

this. With the schismatics, "Peace" was the official name for Catholicism.

"Basilica of Peace" meant simply "Catholic Basilica." Was not this as

much as to say that the others belonged to the dissenters? Doubtless they

restored later on, after the promulgations of Honorius, the Leontian

Basilica, founded by Leontius, Bishop of Hippo, and a martyr. A third was

built by Augustin during his episcopate--the Basilica of the Eight Martyrs

of the White Mace.

It was in the Major, or Cathedral, that Augustin generally preached. To

preach was not only a duty, but one of the privileges of a bishop. As has

been said, the bishop alone had the right to preach in his church. This

arose from the fact that the African dioceses, although comparatively

widespread, had scarcely more people than one of our large parishes to-day.

The position of a bishop was like that of one of our parish priests. There

were almost as many as there were villages, and they were counted by

hundreds.

However that may be, preaching, the real apostolic ministry, was an

exhausting task. Augustin preached almost every day, and often many times a

day--rough work for a man with such a fragile chest. Thus it often happened

that, to save his voice, he had to ask his audience to keep still. He spoke

without study, in a language very near the language of the common people.

Stenographers took down his sermons as he improvised them: hence those

repetitions and lengthinesses which astonish the reader who does not know

the reason for them. There is no plan evident in these addresses. Sometimes

the speaker has not enough time to develop his thought. Then he puts off

the continuation till the next day. Sometimes he comes with a subject all

prepared, and then treats of another, in obedience to a sudden inspiration

which has come to him with a verse of Scripture he has just read. Other

times, he comments many passages in succession, without the least care for

unity or composition.

Let us listen to him in this Basilica of Peace, where during thirty-five

years he never failed to announce the Word of God.... The chant of the

Psalms has just died away. At the far end of the apse, Augustin rises from

his throne with its back to the wall, his pale face distinct against the

golden hue of the mosaic. From that place, as from the height of a pulpit,

he commands the congregation, looking at them above the altar, which is a

plain wooden table placed at the end of the great aisle.

The congregation is standing, the men on one side, the women on the other.

On the other side of the balustrade which separates them from the crowd,

are the widows and consecrated virgins, wrapped in their veils black or

purple. Some matrons, rather overdressed, lean forward in the front rank

of the galleries. Their cheeks are painted, their eyelashes and eyebrows

blackened, their ears and necks overloaded with jewels. Augustin has

noticed them; after a while he will read them a lesson. This audience is

all alive with sympathy and curiosity before he begins. With all its faith

and all its passion it collaborates with the orator. It is turbulent also.

It expresses its opinions and emotions with perfect freedom. The democratic

customs of those African Churches surprise us to-day. People made a noise

as at the theatre or the circus. They applauded; they interrupted the

preacher. Certain among them disputed what was said, quoting passages from

the Bible.

Augustin is thus in perpetual communication with his audience. Nobody has

done less soaring than he. He keeps his eye on the facial expressions

and the attitudes of his public. He talks to them familiarly. When his

sermon is a little lengthy, he wants to know if his listeners are getting

tired--he has kept them standing so long! The time of the morning meal

draws near. Bellies are fasting, stomachs wax impatient. Then says he to

them with loving good-fellowship:

"Go, my very dear brothers and sisters, go and restore your strength--I do

not mean that of your minds, for I see well that they are tireless, but the

strength of your bodies which are the servants of your souls. Go then and

restore your bodies so that they may do their work well, and when they are

restored, come back here and take your spiritual food."

Upon certain days, a blast of the sirocco has passed over the town. The

faithful, crowded in the aisles, are stifling, covered with sweat. The

preacher himself, who is very much worked up, has his face dripping, and

his clothes are all wet. By this he perceives that once more he has been

extremely long. He excuses himself modestly. Or again, he jokes like a

rough apostle who is not repelled by the odour of a lot of human-kind

gathered together.

"Oh, what a smell!" says he. "I must have been speaking a long while

to-day."

These good-natured ways won the hearts of the simple folk who listened to

him. He is aware of the charm he exerts on them, and of the sympathy they

give him back in gratitude for his charity.

"You have loved to come and hear me, my brothers," he said to them. "But

whom have you loved? If it is me--ah, even that is good, my brothers, for

I want to be loved by you, if I do not want to be loved for myself. As for

me, I love you in Christ. And you too, do you love me in Him. Let our love

for one another moan together up to God--and that is the moaning of the

Dove spoken of in the Scripture...."

Although he preaches from the height of his episcopal throne, he is anxious

that his hearers should regard him, Christianly, as their equal. So he

seems as little of the bishop as possible.

"All Christians are servants of the same master.... I have been in the

place where you are--you, my brothers, who listen to me. And now, if I

give the spiritual bread from the height of this chair to the servants of

the Master of us all--well, it is but a few years since I received this

spiritual food with them in a lower place. A bishop, I speak to laymen, but

I know to how many future bishops I speak...."

So he puts himself on an equal footing with his audience by the brotherly

accent in his words. It is not Christendom, the Universal Church, or I know

not what abstract listener he addresses, but the Africans, the people of

Hippo, the parishioners of the Basilica of Peace. He knows the allusions,

the comparisons drawn from local customs, which are likely to impress their

minds. The day of the festival of St. Crispina, a martyr of those parts,

after he had developed his subject at very great length, he asked pardon in

these terms:

"Let us think, brothers, that I have invited you to celebrate the birthday

of the blessed Crispina, and that I have kept up the feast a little too

long. Well, might not the same thing happen if some soldier were to ask you

to dinner and obliged you to drink more than is wise? Let me do as much for

the Word of God, with which you should be drunk and surfeited."

Marriages, as well as birthday feasts, supplied the orator with vivid

allegories. Thus he says that when a marriage feast is made in a house,

organs play upon the threshold, and musicians and dancers begin to sing and

to act their songs. And yet how poor are these earthly enjoyments which

pass away so soon!... "In the House of God, the feast has no end."

Continually, through the commentaries on the Psalms, like comparisons rise

to the surface--parables suited to stir the imagination of Africans. A

thousand details borrowed from local habits and daily life enliven the

exegesis of the Bishop of Hippo. The mules and horses that buck when one

is trying to cure them, are his symbol for the recalcitrant Donatists. The

little donkeys, obstinate and cunning, that trot in the narrow lanes of

Algerian \_casbahs\_, appear here and there in his sermons. The gnats bite in

them. The unendurable flies plaster themselves in buzzing patches on the

tables and walls. Then there are the illnesses and drugs of that country:

the ophthalmias and collyrium. What else? The tarentulas that run along

the beams on the ceiling; the hares that scurry without warning between

the horses' feet on the great Numidian plains. Elsewhere, he reminds his

audience of those men who wear an earring as a talisman; of the dealings

between traders and sailors--a comparison which would go home to this

seafaring people.

The events of the time, the little happenings of the moment, glide into

his sermons. At the same time as the service in church to-day, there is

going to be horse-racing at the circus, and fights of wild beasts or

gladiators at the arena. In consequence, there will not be many people

in the Basilica. "So much the better," says Augustin. "My lungs will get

some rest." Another time, it is advertised through the town that most

sensational attractions will be offered at the theatre--there will be a

scene representing the open sea. The preacher laughs at those who have

deserted the church to go and see this illusion: "They will have," says

he, "the sea on the stage; but we, brothers--ah, we shall have our port in

Jesus Christ." This Saturday, while he is preaching, some Jewish women set

themselves to dance and sing on the terraces of the near houses, by way of

celebrating the Sabbath. In the basilica, the bashing of the crotolos can

be heard, and the thuds of the tambourines. "They would do better," says

Augustin, "to work and spin their wool."

He dwells upon the catastrophes which were then convulsing the Roman world.

The news of them spread with wonderful rapidity. Alaric's Barbarians

have taken Rome and put it to fire and sword. At Jerusalem has been an

earthquake, and the bishop John organizes a subscription for the sufferers

throughout Christendom. At Constantinople, globes of fire have been seen in

the sky. The \_Serapeum\_ of Alexandria has just been destroyed in a riot....

All these things follow each other in lively pictures, without any apparent

order, throughout Augustin's sermons. It is not he who divides his

discourse into three parts, and refrains from passing to the second till he

has learnedly expounded the first. Whether he comments upon the Psalms or

the Gospels, his sermons are no more than explanations of the Scriptures

which he interprets, sometimes in a literal sense, and sometimes in an

allegoric. Let us acknowledge it--his allegoric discourses repel us by

their extreme subtilty, sometimes by their bad taste; and when he confines

himself to the letter of the text, he stumbles among small points of

grammar which weary the attention. We follow him no longer. We think

his audience was very obliging to listen so long--and on their feet--to

these endless dissertations.... And then, suddenly, a great lyrical and

oratorical outburst which carries us away--a wind which blows from the

high mountains, and in the wink of an eye sweeps away like dust all those

fine-spun reasonings.

He is fond of certain commonplaces, and also of certain books of the

Bible--for instance, \_The Song of Songs\_ and the Gospel of St. John, the

one satisfying in him the intellectual, and the other the mystic of love.

He confronts the verse of the Psalm: "Before the morning star have I

begotten thee," with the sublime opening of the Fourth Gospel: "In the

beginning was the Word." He lingers upon the beauty of Christ: \_Speciosus

forma præ filiis hominum\_, "Thou art fairer than the children of men." This

is why he is always repeating with the Psalmist: "Thy face, Lord, have I

sought"--\_Quæsivi vultum tuum, Domine.\_ And the orator, carried away by

enthusiasm, adds: "Magnificent saying! Nothing more divine could be said.

Those feel it who truly love." Another of his favourite subjects is the

kindness of God: \_Videte et gustate quam mitis sit Dominus\_--"O taste

and see that the Lord is good." Naught can equal the pleasure of this

contemplation, of this life in God. Augustin conceives it as a musician

who has fathomed the secret of numbers. "Let your life," he said, "be one

prolonged song.... We do not sing only with the voice and lips when we

intone a canticle, but in us is an inward singing, because there is also in

us Some One who listens...."

To live this rhythmic and divine life we must get free of ourselves, give

ourselves up utterly in a great outburst of charity.

"Why," he cries--"Oh, why do you hesitate to give yourselves lest you

should lose yourselves? It is rather by not giving yourselves that you

lose yourselves. Charity herself speaks to you by the mouth of Wisdom and

upholds you against the terror which fills you at the sound of those words:

'Give yourself.' If some one wanted to sell you a piece of land, he would

say to you: 'Give me your gold.' And for something else, he would say:

'Give me your silver, give me your money.' Listen to what Charity says to

you by the mouth of Wisdom: 'My son, give me thy heart.' 'Give me,' quoth

she. Give what? 'My son, give me thy heart.'... Thy heart was not happy

when it was governed by thee, and was thine, for it turned this way and

that way after gawds, after impure and dangerous loves. 'Tis from there thy

heart must be drawn. Whither lift it up? Where to place it? 'Give me thy

heart,' says Wisdom, 'let it be mine, and it will belong to thee for

always.'"

After the chant of love, the chant of the Resurrection. \_Cantate mihi

canticum novum\_--"Sing to me a new song!" Augustin repeats these words over

and over again. "We wish to rise from the dead," cry souls craving for

eternity. And the Church answers: "Verily, I say unto you, that you shall

rise from the dead. Resurrection of bodies, resurrection of souls, ye shall

be altogether reborn." Augustin has explained no dogma more passionately.

None was more pleasing to the faithful of those times. Ceaselessly they

begged to be strengthened in the conviction of immortality and of meeting

again brotherlike in God.

With what intrepid delight it rose--this song of the Resurrection in

those clear African basilicas swimming in light, with all their brilliant

ornamentation of mosaics and marbles of a thousand colours! And what

artless and confident language those symbolic figures spoke which peopled

their walls--the lambs browsing among clusters of asphodels, the doves, the

green trees of Paradise. As in the Gospel parables, the birds of the field

and farmyard, the fruits of the earth, figured the Christian truths and

virtues. Their purified forms accompanied man in his ascension towards

God. Around the mystic chrisms, circled garlands of oranges and pears and

pomegranates. Cocks, ducks, partridges, flamingoes, sought their pasture in

the Paradisal fields painted upon the walls of churches and cemeteries.

Those young basilicas were truly the temples of the Resurrection, where

all the creatures of the Ark saved from the waters had found their refuge.

Never more in the centuries to follow shall humanity know this frank joy at

having triumphed over death--this youth of hope.

III

THE BISHOP'S BURTHEN

Augustin is not only the most human of all the saints, he is also one

of the most amiable in all the senses of that hackneyed word--amiable

according to the world, amiable according to Christ.

To be convinced of this, he should be observed in his dealings with his

hearers, with his correspondents, even with those he attacks--with the

bitterest enemies of the faith. Preaching, the administration of property,

and sitting in judgment were but a part of that episcopal burthen, \_Sarcina

episcopatus\_, under which he so often groaned. He had furthermore to

catechize, baptize, direct consciences, guard the faithful against error,

and dispute with all those who threatened Catholicism. Augustin was a light

of the Church. He knew it.

Doing his best, with admirable conscientiousness and charity he undertook

these tasks. God knows what it must have cost this Intellectual to fulfil

precisely all the duties of his ministry, down to the humblest. What

he would have liked, above all, was to pass his life in studying the

Scriptures and meditating on the dogmas--not from a love of trifling with

theories, but because he believed such knowledge necessary to whoever gave

forth the Word of God. Most of the priests of that age arrived at the

priesthood without any previous study. They had to improvise, as quick

as they could, a complete education in religious subjects. We are left

astounded before the huge labour which Augustin must have given to acquire

his. Before long he even dominated the whole exegetical and theological

knowledge of his time. In his zeal for divine letters, he knew sleep no

more.

And yet he did not neglect any of his tasks. Like the least of our

parish priests, he prepared the neophytes for the Sacraments. He was

an incomparable catechist, so clear-sighted and scrupulous that his

instructions may still be taken as models by the catechists of to-day.

Neither did he, as an aristocrat of the intelligence, only trouble himself

with persons of culture, and leave to his deacons the care of God's common

people. All had a right to his lessons, the simple peasants as well as the

rich and scholarly. One day, a farmer he was teaching walked off and left

him there in the middle of his discourse. The poor man, who had fasted, and

now listened to his bishop standing, was faint from hunger and felt his

legs tremble under him. He thought it better to run away than to fall down

exhausted at the feet of the learned preacher.

With his knowledge of men, Augustin carefully studied the kind of people

his catechumens were, and adapted his instructions to the character of

each. If they were city folk, Carthaginians, used to spending their time in

theatres and taverns, drunken and lazy, he took a different tone with them

from what he used with rustics who had never left their native \_gourbi\_.

If he were dealing with fashionable people who had a taste for literature,

he did not fail to exalt the beauties of the Scripture, although, he would

say, they had there a very trifling attraction compared to the truths

contained in it. Of all the catechumens, the hardest to deal with, the

most fearsome in his eyes, were the professors--the rhetoricians and the

grammarians. These men are bloated with vanity, puffed up with intellectual

pride. Augustin knew something about that. It will be necessary to rouse

them violently, and before anything else, to exhort them to humility of

mind.

The good saint goes further. Not only is he anxious about the souls, but

also about the bodies of his listeners. Are they comfortable for listening?

As soon as they feel tired they must not hesitate to sit down, as is the

usage in the basilicas beyond seas.

"Would not our arrogance be unbearable," he asked, "if we forbade men who

are our brothers to sit down in our presence, and, much more, men whom we

ought to try with all possible care to make our brothers?..."

If they are seen to yawn, "then things ought to be said to them to awaken

their attention, or to scatter the sad thoughts which may have come into

their minds." The catechist should shew, now a serene joy--the joy of

certainty; now a gaiety which charms people into belief; "and always that

light-heartedness we should have in teaching." Even if we ourselves are sad

from this reason or that, let us remember that Jesus Christ died for those

who are listening to us. Is not the thought of bringing Him disciples

enough to make us joyful?

Bishop Augustin set the example for his priests. It is not enough to

have prepared the conversion of his catechumens with the subtlety of the

psychologist, and such perfect Christian charity; but he accompanies them

to the very end, and charges them once more before the baptismal piscina.

How he is changed! One thinks of the boon-fellow of Romanianus and of

Manlius Theodorus, of the young man who followed the hunts at Thagaste,

and who held forth on literature and philosophy in a select company before

the beautiful horizons of the lake of Como. Here he is now with peasants,

slaves, sailors, and traders. And he takes pleasure in their society. It is

his flock. He ought to love it with all his soul in Jesus Christ. What an

effort and what a victory upon himself an attitude so strange reveals to

us! For really this liking for mean people was not natural to him. He must

have put an heroic will-power into it, helped by Grace.

A like sinking of his preferences is evident in the director of consciences

he became. Here he was obliged to give himself more thoroughly. He was

at the mercy of the souls who questioned him, who consulted him as

their physician. He spends his time in advising them, and exercises a

never-failing supervision of their morals. It is an almost discouraging

enterprise to bend these hardened pagans--above all, these Africans--to

Christian discipline. Augustin is continually reproaching their

drunkenness, gluttony, and lust. The populace were not the only ones to get

drunk and over-eat themselves. The rich at their feasts literally stuffed

till they choked. The Bishop of Hippo never lets a chance go by to recall

them to sobriety.

Oftener still, he recalls them to chastity. He writes long letters on this

subject which are actual treatises. The morals of the age and country are

fully disclosed in them. Husbands are found loudly claiming a right to free

love for themselves, while they force their wives to conjugal fidelity. The

adultery they allow themselves, they punish with death in their wives. They

make an abusive practice of divorce. Upon the most futile reasons, they

send the wife the \_libellus repudii\_--the bill repudiating the marriage--as

the various peoples of Islam do still. This society in a state of

transition was always creating cases of conscience for strict Christians.

For example: If a man cast off his wife under pretext of adultery, might

he marry again? Augustin held that no marriage can be dissolved as long as

both parties are living. But may not this prohibition provoke husbands to

kill their adulterous wives, so as to be free to take a new wife? Another

problem: A catechumen divorced under the pagan law and since remarried,

presents himself for baptism. Is he not an adulterer in the eyes of the

Church? A man who lives with a woman and does not hide it, who even

declares his firm intention of continuing to live with his concubine--can

he be admitted to baptism? Augustin has to answer all these questions, and

go into the very smallest details of casuistry.

Is it forbidden to eat the meats consecrated to idols, even when a man

or woman is dying of hunger? May one enter into agreements with native

camel-drivers and carriers who swear by their gods to keep the bargain?

May a lie be told in certain conditions?--say, so as to get among heretics

in pretending to be one of themselves, and thus be able to spy on them

and denounce them? May adultery be practised with a woman who promises in

exchange to point out heretics?... The Bishop of Hippo severely condemns

all these devious or shameful ways, all these compromises which are

contrary to the pure moral teaching of the Gospel. But he does this without

affecting intolerance and rigidity, and with a reminder that the evil of

sin lies altogether in the intention, and in the consent of the will. In a

word, one must tolerate and put up with what one is powerless to hinder.

Other questions, which it is quite impossible to repeat here, give us a

strange idea of the corruption of pagan morals. Augustin had all he

could do to maintain the Christian rule in such surroundings, where the

Christians themselves were more or less tainted with paganism. But if this

troop of sinners and backsliders was hard to drive, the devout were perhaps

harder. There were the \_continents\_--the widowers and widows who had made a

vow of chastity and found this vow heavy; the consecrated virgins who lived

in too worldly a fashion; the nuns who rebelled against their spiritual

director or their superior; the monks, either former slaves who did not

want to do another stroke of work, or charlatans who played upon public

credulity in selling talismans and miraculous ointments. Then, the married

women who refused themselves to their husbands; and those who gave away

their goods to the poor without their husbands' consent; and also the proud

virgins and widows who despised and condemned marriage.

Then came the crowd of pious souls who questioned Augustin on points of

dogma, who wanted to know all, to clear up everything; those who thought

they should be able here below to see God face to face, to know how we

shall arise, and who asked if the angels had bodies.... Augustin complains

that they are annoying, when he has so many other things to trouble him,

and that they take him from his studies. But he tries charitably to satisfy

them all.

Besides all this, he was obliged to keep up a correspondence with a great

number of people. In addition to his friends and fellow-bishops, he wrote

to unknown people and foreigners; to men in high place and to lowly people;

to the proconsuls, the counts and the vicars of Africa; to the very mighty

Olympius, Master of the Household to the Emperor Honorius; or again, "to

the Right Honourable Lady Maxima," "to the Illustrious Ladies Proba and

Juliana," "to the Very Holy Lady Albina"--women who belonged either to the

provincial nobility, or to the highest aristocracy of Rome. To whom did he

not write?...

And what is admirable in these letters is that he does not answer

negligently to get rid of a tiresome duty. Almost all of them are full

of substantial teaching, long thought over. Many were intended to be

published--they are practically charges. And yet, however grave the tone

of them may be, the cultivated man of the world he had been may be traced.

His correspondents, after the fashion of the time, overwhelm the bishop

with the most fulsome praises. These he accepts, with much ceremony

indeed, but he does accept them as evidence of the charity of his

brethren. Ingenuously, he does his best to return them. Let us not grow

over-scandalized because our men of letters of to-day have debased the

value of complimentary language by squandering and exaggerating it. The

most austere cotemporaries of Augustin, and Augustin himself, outdid them

by a long way in the art and in the abuse of compliments.

Paulinus of Nola, always beflowered and elegant, wrote to Augustin:

"Your letters are a luminous collyrium spread over the eyes of my mind."

Augustin, who remonstrated with him upon the scarcity of his own letters,

replies in language which our own \_Précieuses\_ would not have disowned:

"What! You allow me to pass two summers--and two African summers!--in such

thirst?... Would to God that you would allow enter to the opulent banquet

of your book, the long fast from your writings which you have put me

upon during all a year! If this banquet be not ready, I shall not give

over my complaints, unless, indeed, that in the time between, you send me

something to keep up my strength." A certain Audax, who begged the honour

of a special letter from the great man, calls him "the oracle of the Law";

protests that the whole world celebrates and admires him; and finally, at

the end of his arguments, conjures him in verse to "Let fall upon me the

dew of thy divine word." Augustin, with modesty and benignity, returns his

compliments, but not without slipping into his reply a touch of banter:

"Allow me to point out to you that your fifth line has seven feet. Has

your ear betrayed you, or did you want to find out if I was still capable

of judging these things?"... Truly, he is always capable of judging these

things, nor is he sorry to have it known. A young Greek named Dioscorus,

who is passing through Carthage, questions him upon the philosophy of

Cicero. Augustin exclaims at any one daring to interrupt a bishop about

such trifles. Then, little by little, he grows milder, and carried away by

his old passion, he ends by sending the young man quite a dissertation on

this good subject.

Those are among his innocent whimsicalities. Then, alongside of letters

either too literary, or erudite, or profound, there are others which are

simply exquisite, such as the one he wrote to a young Carthage girl called

Sapida. She had embroidered a tunic for her brother. He was dead, and she

asked Augustin kindly to wear this tunic, telling him that if he would

do this, it would be a great comfort for her in her grief. The bishop

consented very willingly. "I accept this garment," he said to her, "and I

have begun to wear it before writing to you...." Then gently he pities her

sorrow, and persuades her to resignation and hope.

"We should not rebuke people for weeping over the dead who are dear to

them.... When we think of them, and through habit we look for them still

around us, then the heart breaks, and the tears fall like the blood of our

broken heart...."

At the end, in magnificent words, he chants the hymn of the Resurrection:

"My daughter, your brother lives in his soul, if in his body he sleeps.

Does not the sleeper wake? God, who has received his soul, will put it

again in the body He has taken from him, not to destroy it--oh, no, but

some day to give it to him back."

\* \* \* \* \*

This correspondence, voluminous as it is, is nothing beside his numberless

treatises in dogma and polemic. These were the work of his life, and it is

by these posterity has known him. The theologian and the disputer ended by

hiding the man in Augustin. To-day, the man perhaps interests us more. And

this is a mistake. He himself would not have allowed for a moment that his

\_Confessions\_ should be preferred to his treatises on Grace. To study, to

comment the Scriptures, to draw more exact definitions from the dogmas--he

saw no higher employment for his mind, or obligation more important for

a bishop. To believe so as to understand, to understand the better to

believe--it is a ceaseless movement of the intelligence which goes from

faith to God and from God to faith. He throws himself into this great

labour without a shade of any attempt to make literature, with a complete

sinking of his tastes and his personal opinions, and in it he entirely

forgets himself.

One single time he has thought of himself, and it is precisely in the

\_Confessions\_, the spirit of which modern people understand so ill, and

where they try to find something quite different from what the author

intended. He composed them just after he was raised to the bishopric, to

defend himself against the calumnies spread about his conduct. It seems as

if he wanted to say to his detractors: "You believe me guilty. Well, I am

so, and more perhaps than you think, but not in the way you think." A great

religious idea alters this personal defence. It is less a confession, or an

excuse for his faults, in the present sense of the word, than a continual

glorification of the divine mercy. It is less the shame of his sins he

confesses, than the glory of God.

After that, he never thought again of anything but Truth and the Church,

and the enemies of Truth and the Church: the Manichees, the Arians, the

Pelagians--the Donatists, above all. He lets no error go by without

refuting it, no libel without an answer. He is always on the breach. He

might well be compared, in much of his writings, to one of our fighting

journalists. He put into this generally thankless business a wonderful

vigour and dialectical subtlety. Always and everywhere he had to have the

last word. He brought eloquence to it, yet more charity--sometimes even

wit. And lastly, he had a patience which nothing could dishearten. He

repeats the same things a hundred times over. These tiresome repetitions,

into which he was driven by the obstinacy of his opponents, caused him

real pain. Every time it became necessary, he took up again the endless

demonstration without letting himself grow tired. The moment it became a

question of the Truth, Augustin could not see that he had any right to keep

quiet.

In Africa and elsewhere they made fun of what they called his craze for

scribbling. He himself, in his \_Retractations\_, is startled by the number

of his works. He turns over the Scripture saying which the Donatists

amusingly opposed to him: \_Væ mullum loquentibus\_--"Woe unto them of many

words." But calling God to witness, he says to Him: \_Væ tacentibus de

te\_--"Woe unto those who keep silent upon Thee." In the eyes of Augustin,

the conditions were such that silence would have been cowardly. And

elsewhere he adds: "They may believe me or not as they will, but I like

much better to read than to write books...."

In any case, his modesty was evident. "I am myself," he acknowledges,

"almost always dissatisfied with what I say." To the heretics he declares,

with a glance back at his own errors, "I know by experience how easy it

is to be wrong." When there is some doubt in questions of dogma, he does

not force his explanations, but suggests them to his readers. How much

intellectual humility is in that prayer which ends his great work on the

Trinity: "Lord my God, one Trinity, if in these books I have said anything

which comes from Thee, may Thou and Thy chosen receive it. But if it is

from me it comes, may Thou and Thine forgive me."

And again, how much tolerance and charity in those counsels to the faithful

of his diocese who, having been formerly persecuted by the Donatists, now

burned to get their revenge:

"It is the voice of your bishop, my brothers, sounding in your ears. He

implores you, all of you who are in this church, to keep yourselves from

insulting those who are outside, but rather to pray that they may enter

with you into communion."

Elsewhere, he reminds his priests that they must preach at the Jews in a

spirit of friendliness and loving-kindness, without troubling to know if

they listen with gratitude or indignation. "We ought not," said he, "to

bear ourselves proudly against these broken branches of Christ's tree."...

This charity and moderation took nothing from the firmness of his

character. This he proved in a startling way in the discussion he had with

St. Jerome over a passage In the Epistle to the Galatians, and upon the

new translation, of the Bible which Jerome had undertaken. The solitary of

Bethlehem saw a "feint" on the part of St. Paul in the disputed passage:

Augustin said, a "lie." What, then, would become of evangelic truth if

in such a place the Apostle had lied? And would not this be a means of

authorizing all the exegetical fantasies of heresiarchs, who already

rejected as altered or forged all verses of the holy books which conflicted

with their own doctrines?...

As to the new translation of the Bible, it would bring about trouble in the

African churches, where they were accustomed to the ancient version of the

Septuagint. The mistranslations, pointed out by Jerome in the old version,

would upset the faithful and lead them to suspect that the entire Scripture

was false. In this double matter, Augustin defended at once orthodoxy and

tradition from very praiseworthy reasons of prudence.

Jerome retorted in a most aggressive and offensive tone. He flatly accused

the Bishop of Hippo of being jealous of him and of wishing to cut out a

reputation for learning at his expense. In front of his younger and more

supple adversary, he took on the air of an old wrestler who was still

capable of knocking out any one who had the audacity to attack him. He

hurled at Augustin this phrase heavy with menaces: "The tired ox stands

firmer than ever on his four legs."

For all that, Augustin stuck to his opinion, and he confined himself

to replying gently: "In anything I say, I am not only always ready to

receive your observations upon what you find wounding and contrary to your

feelings, but I even ask your advice as earnestly as I can."...

IV

AGAINST "THE ROARING LIONS"

One day (this was soon after he became bishop) Augustin went to visit a

Catholic farmer in the suburbs of Hippo, whose daughter had been lessoned

by the Donatists, and had just enrolled herself among their consecrated

virgins. The father at first had shouted at the deserter, and flogged her

unmercifully by way of improving her state of mind. Augustin, when he heard

of the affair, condemned the farmer's brutality and declared that he would

never receive the girl back into the community unless she came of her own

free will. He then went out to the place to try and settle the matter. On

the way, as he was crossing an estate which belonged to a Catholic matron,

he fell in with a priest of the Donatist Church at Hippo. The priest at

once began to insult him and his companions, and yelled:

"Down with the traitors! Down with the persecutors!"

And he vomited out abominations against the matron herself who owned the

land. As much from prudence as from Christian charity, Augustin did not

answer. He even prevented those with him from falling upon the insulter.

Incidents of this kind happened almost every day. About the same time,

the Donatists of Hippo made a great noise over the rebaptizing of another

apostate from the Catholic community. This was a good-for-nothing loafer

who beat his old mother, and the bishop severely rebuked his monstrous

conduct.

"Well, as you talk in that tone of voice," said the loafer, "I'm going to

be a Donatist."

Through bravado, he continued to ill-treat the poor old woman, and to make

the worst kind of threats. He roared in savage fury:

"Yes, I'll become a Donatist, and I'll have your blood."

And the young ruffian did really go over to the Donatist party. In

accordance with the custom among the heretics, he was solemnly rebaptized

in their basilica, and he exhibited himself on the platform clad in the

white robe of the purified. People in Hippo were much shocked. Augustin,

full of indignation, addressed his protests to Proculeianus, the Donatist

bishop. "What! is this man, all bloody with a murder in his conscience,

to walk about for eight days in white robes as a model of innocence and

purity?" But Proculeianus did not condescend to reply.

These cynical proceedings were trifling compared to the vexations which the

Donatists daily inflicted on their opponents. Not only did they tamper with

Augustin's people, but the country dwellers of the Catholic Church were

continually interfered with on their lands, pillaged, ravaged, and burned

out by mobs of fanatical brigands who organized a rule of terror from one

end of Numidia to the other. Supported in secret by the Donatists, they

called themselves "the Athletes of Christ." The Catholics had given them

the contemptuous name of "Circoncelliones," or prowlers around cellars,

because they generally plundered cellars and grain-houses. Troops of

fanaticized and hysterical women rambled round with them, scouring the

country like your true bacchantes, clawing the unfortunate wretches who

fell into their hands, burning farms and harvests, broaching barrels of

wine and oil, and crowning these exploits by orgies with "the Athletes of

Christ." When they saw a haystack blazing in the fields, the country-folk

were panic-stricken--the "Circoncelliones" were not far off. Soon they

appeared, brandishing their clubs and bellowing their war cry: \_Deo

laudes!\_--"Praise be to God." "Your shout," said Augustin to them, "is more

dreaded by our people than the roaring of lions."

Something had to be done to quell these furious monsters, and to resist

the encroachments and forcible acts of the heretics. These, by way of

frightening the Catholic bishops, told them roundly:

"We don't want any of your disputes, and we are going to rebaptize just as

it suits us. We are going to lay snares for your sheep and to rend them

like wolves. As for you, if you are good shepherds, keep quiet!"

Augustin was not a man to keep quiet, nor yet to spend his strength in

small local quarrels. He saw big; he did not imprison himself within the

limits of his diocese. He knew that Numidia and a good part of Africa

were in the hands of the Donatists; that they had a rival primate to the

Catholic primate at Carthage; that they had even sent a Pope of their

community to Rome. In a word, they were in the majority. Everywhere a

dissenting Church rose above the orthodox Church, when it did not succeed

in stifling it altogether. At all costs the progress of this sect must be

stopped. In Augustin's eyes there was no more urgent work. For him and his

flock it was a question of insuring their lives, since they were attacked

even in their fields and houses. From the moment he first came to Hippo,

as a simple priest, he had thrown himself intrepidly into this struggle.

He never ceased till Donatism was conquered and trampled underfoot. To

establish peace and Catholic unity everywhere was the great labour of his

episcopate.

Who, then, were these terrible Donatists whom we have been continually

striking against since the beginning of this history?

It would soon be a century since they had been disturbing and desolating

Africa. Just after the great persecution of Diocletian, the sect was born,

and it increased with amazing rapidity. During this persecution, evidence

had not been wanting of the moral slackness in the African Church. A large

number of lay people apostatized, and a good number of bishops and priests

handed over to the pagan authorities, besides the devotional objects,

the Scriptures and the muniments of their communities. In Numidia, and

especially at Constantine, scandalous scenes took place. The cowardice

of the clergy was lamentable. Public opinion branded with the names of

\_traditors\_, or traitors, those who had weakened and given over the sacred

books to the pagans.

The danger once over, the Numidians, whose behaviour had been so little

brilliant, determined to redeem themselves by audacity, and to prove

with superb impudence that they had been braver than the others. So they

set themselves to shout \_traditor\_ against whoever displeased them, and

particularly against those of Carthage and the Proconsulate. At bottom it

was the old rivalry between the two Africas, East and West.

Under the reign of Constantine a peace had been patched up, when it fell

out that a new Bishop of Carthage had to be elected, and the Archdeacon

Cæcilianus, whose name was put forward, was accused of preventing the

faithful from visiting the martyrs in their prisons. The zealots contended

that in collusion with his bishop, Mensurius, he had given up the Holy

Scriptures to the Roman authorities to be burned. The election promised to

be stormy. The supporters of the Archdeacon, who feared the hostility of

the Numidian bishops, did not wait for their arrival. They hurried things

over. Cæcilianus was elected and consecrated by three bishops of the

district, of whom one was a certain Felix of Abthugni.

At once the opposite clan, backed up by the Numidians, objected. At their

head was a wealthy Spanish woman named Lucilla, an unbalanced devotee,

who, it seemed, always carried about her person a bone of a martyr, and

a doubtful one at that. She would ostentatiously kiss her relic before

receiving the Eucharist. The Archdeacon Cæcilianus forbade this devotion as

superstitious, and thus made a relentless enemy of the fanatical Spaniard.

All the former accusations were renewed against him, and it was added

that Felix of Abthugni, who had consecrated him, was a \_traditor\_. Hence

the election was void, by the single fact of the unworthiness of the

consecrating bishops. Lucilla, having bribed a section of the bishops

assembled in council, Cæcilianus was deposed, and the deacon Majorinus

elected in his room. He himself was soon after succeeded by Donatus, an

active, clever, and energetic man, who organized resistance so ably, and

who represented so well the spirit of the sect, that he left it his name.

Henceforth, Donatism enters into history.

But Cæcilianus had on his side the bishops overseas and the Imperial

Government. The Pope of Rome and the Emperor recognized him as legitimately

elected. Besides that, he cleared himself of all the grievances urged

against him. Finally, an inquiry, conducted by laymen, proved that Felix of

Abthugni was not a \_traditor\_. The Donatists appealed to Constantine, then

to two Councils convoked successively at Rome and Arles. Everywhere they

were condemned. Moreover, the Council of Arles declared that the character

of him who confers the Sacraments has no influence whatever on their

validity. Thus, baptism and ordination, even conferred by a \_traditor\_,

were canonically sound.

This decision was regarded as an abominable heresy by the Donatists. As a

matter of fact, there was an old African tradition, accepted by St. Cyprian

himself, that an unworthy priest could not administer the Sacraments. The

local prejudice would not yield: all were rebaptized who had been baptized

by the Catholics--that is to say, by the supporters of the \_traditors\_.

The theological question was complicated with a question of property which

was all but insoluble. Since the Donatist bishops were resolved to separate

from the Catholic communion, did they mean to give up, with their title,

their basilicas and the property belonging to their churches? Supposing

that they themselves were disinterested, they had behind them the crowd of

clients and land-tillers who got their living out of the Church, and dwelt

on Church property. Never would these people allow a rival party to alter

the direction of the charities, to plant themselves in their fields and

their \_gourbis\_, to expel them from their cemeteries and basilicas. Other

reasons, still deeper perhaps, induced the Donatists to persevere in the

schism. These religious dissensions were agreeable to that old spirit

of division which at all times has been the evil genius of Africa. The

Africans have always felt the need of segregating themselves from one

another in hostile \_cofs\_. They hate each other from one village to

another--for nothing, just, for the pleasure of hating and felling each

other to the ground.

At bottom, here is what Donatism really was: It was an extra sharp attack

of African individualism. These rebels brought in nothing new in dogma.

They would not even have been heretics without their claim to rebaptize.

They limited themselves to retain a position gained long ago; to keep

their churches and properties, or to seize those of the Catholics upon the

pretence that they were themselves the legitimate owners. With that, they

affected a respect for tradition, an austerity in morals and discipline,

which made them perfect puritans. Yes, they were the pure, the

irreconcilables, who alone had not bent before the Roman officials. All

this was very pleasing to the discontented and quarrelsome, and caressed

the popular instinct in its tendency to particularism.

That is why the sect became, little by little, mistress of almost the

whole country. Then it subdivided, crumbled up into little churches which

excommunicated each other. In Southern Numidia, the citadels of orthodox

Donatism, so to speak, were Thimgad and Bagai. Carthage, with its primate,

was the official centre. But in the Byzacena and Tripolitana Regio,

there were the Maximianists, and the Rogatists in Mauretania, who had

cut themselves off from the Great Church. These divisions of the schism

corresponded closely enough to the natural compartments of North Africa.

There must be some incompatibility of temper between these various regions.

To this day, Algiers prides itself on not thinking like Constantine, which

does not think like Bona or like Tunis.

Are we to see in Donatism a nationalist or separatist movement directed

against the Roman occupation? That would be to transport quite modern ideas

into antiquity. No more in Augustin's time than in our own was there such a

thing as African nationality. But if the sectaries had no least thought of

separating from Rome, it is none the less true that they were in rebellion

against her representatives, temporal as well as spiritual. Supposing that

Rome had yielded to them--an impossible event, of course--that would have

meant a surrender to the claims of Africans who wished to be masters of

their property as well as of their religious beliefs in their own country.

What more could they have wanted? It little mattered to them who was the

nominal master, provided that they had the realities of government in their

hands. Altogether, Donatism is a regionalist revindication, very strongly

characterized. It is a remarkable fact that it was among the indigenous

population, ignorant of Latin, that the most of its adherents were

recruited.

\* \* \* \* \*

Such was the position of the Church in Africa when Augustin was named

Bishop of Hippo. He judged it at once, with his clear-sightedness, his

strong good sense, his broad outlook of a Roman citizen freed from the

smallnesses of a local spirit, his Christian idealism which took no heed

of the accidents or considerations of worldly prosperity. What! was

Catholicism to become an African religion, a restricted sect, wretchedly

tied to the letter of tradition, to the exterior practices of worship? To

reign in a little corner of the world--did Christ die for that? Never!

Christ died for the wide world. The only limits of His Church are the

limits of the universe. And besides, in this resolution to exclude, what

becomes of the great principle of Charity? It is by charity, above all,

that we are Christians. Faith without love is a faith stagnant and dead....

Augustin also foresaw the consequences of spiritual separation; he had them

already under his eyes. The Church is the great spring, not only of love,

but of intelligence. Once cut away from this reviving spring, Donatism

would become dry and stunted like a branch stripped from a tree. The

deep sense of its dogmas would become impoverished as its works emptied

themselves of the spirit of charity. Obstinacy, narrowness, lack of

understanding, fanaticism, and cruelty--there you had the inevitable fruits

of schism. Augustin knew the rudeness and ignorance of his opponents, even

of the most cultivated among them: he might well ask himself in anguish

what would become of the African Church deprived of the benefit of Roman

culture, isolated from the great intellectual current which united all the

churches beyond seas. Finally, he knew his fellow-countrymen; he knew that

the Donatists, even victorious, even sole masters of the land, would turn

against themselves the fury they now satisfied against the Catholics, and

never stop tearing each other in pieces. Here was now nearly a hundred

years that they had kept Africa in fire and blood. This meant before very

long a return to barbarism. Separated from Catholicism, they would really

separate from the Empire and even from civilization. And so it was that

in fighting for Catholic unity, Augustin fought for the Empire and for

civilization.

Confronted with these barbarians and sectaries, his attitude could not be

doubtful for a single moment. He must do his best to bring them back to the

Church. It was only a matter of hitting upon the most effectual means.

Preaching, for an orator such as he was, should be an excellent weapon.

His eloquence, his dialectic, his profane and sacred learning, gave him an

immense superiority over the defenders of the opposite side. He certainly

kept in the Church many Catholics who were ready to apostatize. But before

the crowd of schismatics, all these high gifts were as good as lost.

The people were in no wise anxious to know upon which side truth was to

be found. They were Donatists, as they were Numidians or Carthaginians,

without knowing why--because everybody about them was. Many might have

answered like that grammarian of Constantine, who told the Inquisitors with

astute simplicity:

"I am a professor of Roman literature, a teacher of Latin grammar. My

father was a decurion at Constantine; my grandfather was a soldier and

had served in the guard. Our family is of Moorish blood.... As for me, I

am quite ignorant about the origin of the schism: I am just one of the

ordinary faithful of the people called Christians. When I was at Carthage,

Bishop Secundus came there one day. I heard tell that they found out that

Bishop Cæcilianus had been ordained irregularly by I don't know who, and

they elected another bishop against him. That's how the schism began at

Carthage. I have no means of knowing much about the origin of the schism,

because there has never been more than one church in our city. If there has

been a schism here, we know nothing about it."

When a grammarian talked thus, what could have been the thoughts of

agricultural labourers, city workmen, and slaves? They belonged to an

estate, or a quarter of a town, where no other faith than theirs had ever

been professed. They were Donatists like their employers, like their

neighbours, like the other people of the \_cof\_ to which they had belonged

from father to son. The theological side of the question left them

absolutely indifferent. If Augustin tried to debate with them, they refused

to listen and referred him to their bishops. That was the word of command.

The bishops, on their side, avoided all discussion. Augustin tried in vain

to arrange an argument with Proculeianus, his Donatist colleague at Hippo.

And if some of them shewed themselves more obliging, the evasions and

reticences of the antagonist, and sometimes outside circumstances, made the

debate utterly futile. At Thubursicum the audience raised such a noise in

the place where Augustin was debating with the bishop Fortunius, that they

were no longer able to hear each other. At other times, the meeting sank to

an oratorical joust, wherein they tired themselves out passading against

words, instead of attacking the matters at issue. Augustin felt that he was

losing his time. Besides, the Donatist bishops presented an obstinate front

against which everything smashed.

"Leave us in our errors," they said ironically. "If we are lost in your

eyes, why follow us about? We don't want to be saved."

And they prohibited their flocks from saluting Catholics, from speaking to

them, from going into their churches or into their houses, from sitting

down in the midst of them. They laid an interdict on their adversaries.

Primanius, the Donatist Primate of Carthage, upon being invited to a

conference, answered proudly:

"The sons of the martyrs can have nothing to do with the race of traitors."

This being the state of the case, no method of pacification was left but

written controversy. Augustin shewed himself tireless at it. It was chiefly

in these letters and treatises against the Donatists that he was not afraid

to repeat himself. He knew that he was dealing with the deaf, and with

the deaf who did not want to hear: he was obliged to raise his voice.

With admirable self-denial he reiterated the same arguments a hundred

times over, a hundred times took up the history of the quarrel from the

beginning, spreading such a light over the quibbles and refinings of his

contradictors, that it should have brought conviction to the bluntest

minds. "No," he repeated, "Cæcilianus was not a \_traditor\_, nor Felix of

Abthugni either who consecrated him bishop. The documents are there to

prove this. And even supposing they were, can the fault of a single man

be charged to the whole Church?... Then why do you baptize the Catholics

under the pretence that their priests are \_traditors\_ and as such unworthy

to administer the Sacraments? It is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and not

the virtue of the priest which renders baptism efficacious. If it were

otherwise, what was the good of the Redemption? It is the fact that by the

voluntary death of Christ, all men have been called to salvation. Salvation

is not the privilege of Africans only. Being Catholic, the Church should

take in the whole world...."

In the long run, these continual repetitions end by seeming wearisome to

modern readers: for us there arises out of all these discussions a dense

and intolerable boredom. But let us remember that all this was singularly

living for Augustin's cotemporaries, that these thankless developments were

read with passion. And then, too, it was a question of the unity of the

Church which involved, as we cannot too often repeat, the interest of the

Empire and civilization.

Against so persuasive a power the Donatists opposed a conspiracy of

silence. Their bishops forbade the people to read what Augustin wrote. They

did more--they concealed their own libels so that it was impossible to

reply to them. But Augustin used all his skill to unearth them. He refuted

them, and had his refutations recopied and posted on the walls of the

basilicas. The copies circulated through the province and the whole Roman

world.

This would have had an excellent result if the quarrel had been entirely

over questions of theory. But immense property interests came into it,

and rancours and terrible hates. Augustin was forced to pass from verbal

polemics to direct action--defensive action, at first, and then attack.

While he and his fellow-bishops did their utmost to preach peace, the

Donatist bishops urged their followers to the holy war. Augustin even

received threats on his life. During one of his visitations, he was nearly

assassinated. Men in ambush lay in wait for him. By a providential chance,

he took the wrong road, and owed his life to this mistake. His pupil

Possidius, who was then Bishop of Guelma, was not so lucky. Brought to

bay in a house by the Donatist bishop Crispinus, he defended himself

desperately. They set fire to the house to turn him out. When there was

nothing else left but to be burned alive, he did come out. The band of

Donatists seized him, and would have beaten his brains out, if Crispinus

himself, fearing a prosecution for murder, had not interfered. But the

assailants sacked the property and slaughtered all the horses and mules

in the stables. At Bagai, Bishop Maximianus was stabbed in his basilica.

A furious mob smashed the altar and began to strike the victim with the

fragments, and left him for dead on the flags. The Catholics lifted up his

body, but the Donatists plucked him out of their hands and flung him from

the top of a tower, and he fell on a dunghill which broke the fall. The

unhappy man still breathed, and by a miracle he recovered.

Meanwhile, the Circoncelliones, armed with their bludgeons, continued to

pillage and burn the farms. They tortured the owners to extract their money

from them. They made them toil round the mill-path like beasts of burthen,

while they lashed at them with whips. At their back, the Donatist priests

invaded the Catholic churches and lands. There and then they rebaptized

the labourers. These doings were, indeed, very like the practices of the

African Mussulmans to-day, who, in like circumstances, always begin by

converting the Christian farm-hands by main force. Then they purified

the basilicas by scraping down the walls and washing the floors with big

douches of water; and after demolishing the altar, they scattered salt

where it had stood. It was a perfect disinfection. The Donatists treated

the Catholics like the plague-stricken.

Such acts cried out for vengeance. Augustin, who up till this time had

recoiled from asking the public authorities to prosecute, who, as an

observer of the apostolic tradition, did not recognize the interference

of the civil power in Church matters--well, Augustin had to give way to

circumstances, and also to the pressure brought to bear on him by his

colleagues. Councils assembled at Carthage petitioned the Emperor to take

exceptional measures against the Donatists, who laughed at all the laws

directed against heretics. When they were summoned before the courts they

demonstrated to the judges, who were often pagans incompetent to decide in

these questions, that it was they who really belonged to the only orthodox

Church. Something must be done to end this equivocal position, and to bring

about once for all a categorical condemnation of the schism. Augustin,

acting in concert with the primate Aurelius, was the ruling spirit of these

meetings.

Let us not judge his conduct by modern ideas, or be in a hurry to exclaim

against his intolerance. He and the Catholic bishops, in acting thus,

were complying with the old tradition which had influenced all the pagan

governments. Rome, particularly, though it recognized all the local sects,

all the foreign religions, never allowed any of its subjects to refuse to

fall in with the official religion. The persecutions of the Christians and

the Jews had no other motive. Now that it was become the State religion,

Christianity, willingly or unwillingly, had to summon people to the same

obedience. The Emperors made a special point of this from political reasons

easy to understand--to prevent riots and maintain public order. Even if the

bishops had refrained from all complaint, the Imperial Government would

have acted without them and suppressed the disturbances caused by the

heretics.

Just look at the situation and the men as they were at that moment in

Africa. It was the Catholics who were persecuted, and that with revolting

fury and cruelty. They were obliged to defend themselves. In the next

place, the distribution of property in those countries made conversions

in batches singularly easy. Multitudes of farm tenants, workmen, and

agricultural slaves, lived upon the immense estates of one owner. Without

any interest in dogmatic questions, they were Donatists simply because

their master was. To change these devouring wolves into tranquil sheep, it

was often quite enough if the master got converted. The great blessing of

peace depended upon pressure being brought to bear on certain persons. When

all day and every day there was a risk of being murdered or burned out by

irresponsible ruffians, the temptation was very strong to fall back on such

a prompt and simple remedy. Augustin and his colleagues ended by making up

their minds to do so. For that matter, they had no choice. They were bound

to strike, or be themselves suppressed by their enemies.

However, before resorting to rigorous measures, they resolved to send forth

a supreme appeal for reconciliation. The Catholics proposed a meeting to

the Donatists in which they would loyally examine one another's grievances.

As personal or material questions made the great bar to an understanding,

they promised that every Donatist bishop who turned convert should keep

his see. In places where a schismatic and an orthodox bishop were found

together, they would come to a friendly agreement to govern the diocese by

turns. Where it was impossible for this to be done, it was proposed that

the Catholic should resign in favour of the other. Augustin lent all his

eloquence to carry this motion, which was sufficiently heroic for a good

number of bishops who were not so detached as he from the goods of this

world. And one must allow that it was difficult to go much further in the

way of self-denial.

After a good deal of skirmishing and hesitation on the side of the

schismatics, the Conference met at Carthage in June of the year 411, under

the presidency of an Imperial commissioner, the tribune Marcellinus. Once

again, the Donatists saw themselves condemned. Upon the report of the

commissioner, a decree of Honorius classed them definitely among heretics.

They were forbidden to rebaptize or to assemble together, under penalties

of fine and confiscation. Refractory countrymen and slaves would be liable

to corporal punishment, and as for the clerics, they would be banished.

The effect of these new laws was not long in appearing, and it fully

answered the wishes of the orthodox bishops. Many populations returned, or

pretended to return, to the Catholic communion. This result was largely

the work of Augustin, who for twenty years had worked to bring it about by

preaching and controversy. But, as might be expected, he did not overdo

his triumph. Without delay, he set himself to preach moderation to the

conquerors. Nor had he waited till the enemy was defeated to do that. Ten

years before, while the Donatists were besetting the Catholics everywhere,

he said to the priests of his communion:

"Remember this, my brothers, so as to practise and preach it with

never-varying gentleness. Love the men; kill the lie! Lean on truth without

pride; fight for it without cruelty. Pray for those whom you chide, and for

those to whom you shew their error."

However, the victory of the party of peace was not so thorough as it had

seemed at first. A good many fanatics here and there grew obstinate in

their resistance. The Circoncelliones, maddened, distinguished themselves

by a new outbreak of ravages and cruelties. They tortured and mutilated all

the Catholics who fell into their hands. They had invented an unheard-of

refinement of torture, which was to cover with lime diluted with vinegar

the eyes of their victims. The priest Restitutus was assassinated in the

suburbs of Hippo. A bishop had his tongue and his hand cut off. If the

towns were pretty quiet, terror began to reign once more in the country

places.

The Roman authorities exerted themselves to put an end to these bloody

scenes. They heavily chastised the offenders whenever they could catch

them. In his charity, Augustin interceded for them with the judges. He

wrote to the tribune Marcellinus:

"We would not that the servants of God should be revenged by hurts like to

those they suffered. Surely, we are not against depriving the guilty of the

means to do harm, but we consider it will be enough, without taking their

lives or wrenching any limb from them, to turn them from their senseless

tumult by the restraining power of the laws, in bringing them back to calm

and reason; or, in a last resort, to take away the opportunity for criminal

actions by employing them in some useful work.... Christian judge, in this

matter fulfil the duty of a father, and while repressing injustice, do not

forget humanity."

This compassion of Augustin was shewn particularly in his meeting with

Emeritus, the Donatist Bishop of Cherchell (or as it was then called,

Mauretanian Cæsarea), one of the most stubborn among the irreconcilables.

His attitude in dealing with this uncompromising enemy was not only humane,

but courteous, full of graciousness, and of the most sensitive charity.

This fell out in the autumn of the year 418, seven years after the great

Conference at Carthage. Augustin was sixty-four years old. How was it

that he who had always had such feeble health undertook at this age the

long journey from Hippo to Cæsarea? We know that the Pope, Zozimus, had

entrusted him with a mission to the Church of that town. With his tireless

zeal, always ready to march for the glory of Christ, the old bishop

doubtless saw in this journey a fresh opportunity for an apostle. So

he started off, in spite of the roads, which were very unsafe in those

troublous times, in spite of the crushing heat of the season--the end of

September. He travelled six hundred miles across the endless Numidian

plain and the mountainous regions of the Atlas, preaching in the churches,

halting in the towns and the hamlets to decide questions of private

interest, ever pursued by a thousand business worries and by the squabbles

of litigants and the discontented. At last, after many weeks of fatigue and

tribulation, he reached Cherchell, where he was the guest of Deuterius, the

metropolitan Bishop of Mauretania.

Now Emeritus, the deposed bishop, lived mysteriously in the suburbs, in

constant fear of some forcible action on the part of the authorities.

When he learned the friendly intentions of Augustin, he came out of his

hiding-place and shewed himself in the town. In one of the squares of

Cæsarea the two prelates met. Augustin, who had formerly seen Emeritus at

Carthage, recognized him, hurried over to him, saluted him, and at once

suggested a friendly talk.

"Let us go into the church," he said. "This square is hardly suitable for a

talk between two bishops."

Emeritus, flattered, agreed. The conversation continued in such a cordial

tone that Augustin was already rejoicing upon having won back the

schismatic. Deuterius, following the line of conduct which the Catholic

bishops had adopted, spoke of resigning and handing over the see to the

other. It was agreed that within two days Emeritus should come to the

cathedral for a public discussion with his colleague of Hippo. At the

appointed hour he appeared. A great crowd of people gathered to hear

the two orators. The basilica was full. Then Augustin, turning to the

impenitent Donatist, said to him mildly:

"Emeritus, my brother, you are here. You were also at our Conference at

Carthage. If you were beaten there, why do you come here now? If, on the

other hand, you think that you were not beaten, tell us what leads you to

believe that you had the advantage...."

What change had Emeritus undergone in two days? Whatever it was, he

disappointed the hopes of Augustin and the people of Cæsarea. He returned

only ambiguous phrases to the most pressing and brotherly urging. Finally,

he took refuge in an angry silence from which it was found impossible to

draw him.

Augustin went home without having converted the heretic. No doubt he was

sorely disappointed. Nevertheless, he shewed no resentment; he even took

measures to ensure the safety of the recalcitrant, in a charitable fear

less the roused people might do him a bad turn. With all that, when he

looked back at the results of nearly thirty years of struggle against

schism, he might well say to himself that he had done good work for the

Church. Donatism, in fact, was conquered, and conquered by him. Was he

at last to have a chance to rest himself, with the only rest suitable

to a soul like his, in a steady meditation and study of the Scriptures?

Henceforth, would he be allowed to live a little less as a bishop and a

little more as a monk? This was always the strong desire of his heart....

But new and worse trials awaited him at Hippo.

THE SIXTH PART

FACE TO FACE WITH THE BARBARIANS

Et nunc veniant omnes quicumque amant Paradisum, locum quietis, locum

securitatis, locum perpetuae felicitatis, locum in quo non pertimescas

Barbarum.

"And now let all those come who love Paradise, the place of quiet, the

place of safety, the place of eternal happiness, the place where the

Barbarian need be feared no more."

\_Sermon upon the Barbarian Persecution\_, vii, 9.

I

THE SACK OF ROME

During June of the year 403, an astonishing event convulsed the former

capital of the Empire. The youthful Honorius, attended by the regent

Stilicho, came there to celebrate his triumph over Alaric and the Gothic

army, defeated at Pollentia.

The pageantry of a triumph was indeed a very astonishing sight for

the Romans of that period. They had got so unused to them! And no

less wonderful was the presence of the Emperor at the Palatine. Since

Constantine's reign, the Imperial palaces had been deserted. They had

hardly been visited four times in a century by their master.

Rome had never got reconciled to the desertion of her princes. When the

Court was moved to Milan, and then to Ravenna, she felt she had been

uncrowned. Time after time the Senate appealed to Honorius to shew himself,

at least, to his Roman subjects, since political reasons were against his

dwelling among them. This journey was always put off. The truth is, the

Christian Cæsars did not like Rome, and mistrusted her still half-pagan

Senate and people. It needed this unhoped-for victory to bring Honorius

and his councillors to make up their minds. The feeling of a common danger

had for the moment drawn the two opposing religions together, and here

they were apparently making friends in the same patriotic delight. Old

hates were forgotten. In fact, the pagan aristocracy had hopes of better

treatment from Stilicho. On account of all these reasons, the triumphant

Cæsar was received at Rome with delirious joy.

The Court, upon leaving Ravenna, had crossed the Apennines. A halt was

called on the banks of the Clitumnus, where in ancient times the great

white herds were found which were sacrificed at the Capitol during a

triumph. But the gods of the land had fallen; there would be no opiman bull

this time on their altars. The pagans felt bitter about it.

Thence, by Narnia and the Tiber valley, they made their way down into the

plain. The measured step of the legions rang upon the large flags of the

Flaminian way. They crossed the Mulvius bridge--and old Rome rose like a

new city. In anticipation of a siege, the regent had repaired the Aurelian

wall. The red bricks of the enclosure and the fresh mason-work of the

towers gleamed in the sun. Finally, striking into the \_Via lata\_, the

procession marched to the Palatine.

The crowd was packed in this long, narrow street, and overflowed into the

nearest alleys. Women, elaborately dressed, thronged the balconies, and

even the terraces of the palace. All at once the people remarked that the

Senate was not walking before the Imperial chariot. Stilicho, who wished to

conciliate their good graces, had, contrary to custom, dispensed them from

marching on foot before the conqueror. People talked with approval of this

wily measure in which they saw a promise of new liberties. But applause and

enthusiastic cheers greeted the young Honorius as he passed by, sharing

with Stilicho the honour of the triumphal car.

The unequalled splendour of his \_trabea\_, of which the embroideries

disappeared under the number and flash of colour of the jewels, left the

populace gaping. The diadem, a masterpiece of goldsmith's work, pressed

heavily on his temples. Emerald pendants twinkled on each side of his neck,

which, as it was rather fat, with almost feminine curves, suggested at once

to the onlookers a comparison with Bacchus. They found he had an agreeable

face, and even a soldierly air with his square shoulders and stocky neck.

Matrons gazed with tender eyes on this Cæsar of nineteen, who had, at that

time, a certain beauty, and the brilliance, so to speak, of youth. This

degenerate Spaniard, who was really a crowned eunuch, and was to spend his

life in the society of the palace eunuchs and die of dropsy--this son of

Theodosius was just then fond of violent exercise, of hunting and horses.

But he was even now becoming ponderous with unhealthy fat. His build and

bloated flesh gave those who saw him at a distance a false notion of his

strength. The Romans were most favourably impressed by him, especially the

young men.

But the army, the safeguard of the country, was perhaps even more admired

than the Emperor. The legions, following the ruler, had almost deserted

the capital. The flower of the troops were almost unknown there. In

consequence, the march past of the cavalry was quite a new sight for the

people. A great murmur of admiration sounded as the \_cataphracti\_ appeared,

gleaming in the coats of mail which covered them from head to foot. Upon

their horses, caparisoned in defensive armour, they looked like equestrian,

statues--like silver horsemen on bronze horses. Childish cries greeted each

\_draconarius\_ as he marched by carrying his ensign--a dragon embroidered on

a long piece of cloth which flapped in the wind. And the crowd pointed at

the crests of the helmets plumed with peacock feathers, and the scarfs of

scarlet silk flowing over the camber of the gilded cuirasses....

The military show poured into the Forum, swept up the \_Via Sacra\_, and when

it had passed under the triumphal arches of the old emperors, halted at the

Palace of Septimus Severus. In the Stadium, the crowd awaited Honorius.

When he appeared on the balcony of the Imperial box, wild cheering burst

out on all the rows of seats. The Emperor, diadem on head, bowed to the

people. Upon that the cheers became a tempest. Rome did not know how to

express her happiness at having at last got her master back.

On the eve of the worst catastrophes she had this supreme day of glory, of

desperate pride, of unconquerable faith in her destiny. The public frenzy

encouraged them in the maddest hopes. The poet Claudian, who had followed

the Court, became the mouthpiece of these perilous illusions. "Arise!" he

cried to Rome, "I prithee arise, O venerable queen! Trust in the goodwill

of the gods. O city, fling away the mean fears of age, \_thou who art

immortal as the heavens\_!..."

For all that, the Barbarian danger continued to threaten. The victory

of Pollentia, which, moreover, was not a complete victory, had settled

nothing. Alaric was in flight in the Alps, but he kept his eye open for a

favourable chance to fall back upon Italy and wrench concessions of money

and honours from the Court of Ravenna. Supported by his army of mercenaries

and adventurers in the pay of the Empire like himself, his dealings with

Honorius were a kind of continual blackmail. If the Imperial Government

refused to pay the sums which he protested it owed him for the maintenance

of his troops, he would pay himself by force. Rome, where fabulous riches

had accumulated for so many centuries, was an obvious prey for him and his

men. He had coveted it for a long time; and to get up his courage for this

daring exploit, as well as to work upon his soldiers, he pretended that he

had a mission from Heaven to chastise and destroy the new Babylon. In his

Pannonian forests it would seem he had heard mysterious voices which said

to him: "Advance, and thou shalt destroy the city!"

This leader of clans had nothing of the conqueror about him. He understood

that he was in no wise cut out to wear the purple; he himself felt the

Barbarian's cureless inferiority. But he also felt that neither was he

born to obey. If he asked for the title of Prefect of the City, and if he

persisted in offering his services to the Empire, it was as a means to get

the upper hand of it more surely. Repulsed, disdained by the Court, he

tried to raise himself in his own eyes and in the eyes of the common people

by giving himself the airs of an instrument of justice, a man designed by

fate, who marches blindly to a terrible purpose indicated by the divine

wrath. It often happened that he was duped by his own mummery. This turbid

Barbarian soul was prone to the most superstitious terrors.

Notwithstanding his rodomontades, it is certain that in his heart he was

scared by Rome. He hardly dared to attack it. In the first place, it was

not at all a convenient operation for him. His army of mercenaries had no

proper implements to undertake the siege of this huge city, of which the

defence lines were thrown out in so wide a perimeter. He had to come back

to it twice, before he could make up his mind to invest it seriously. The

first time, in 408, he was satisfied with starving the Romans by cutting

off the food supply. He had pitched his camp on the banks of the Tiber in

such a way as to capture the shipping between the capital and the great

store-houses built near the mouth of the river. From the ramparts, the

Romans could see the Barbarian soldiers moving about, with their sheepskin

coats dyed to a crude red. Panic-stricken, the aristocracy fled to its

villas in Campania, or Sicily, or Africa. They took with them whatever

they were able to carry. They sought refuge in the nearest islands, even

in Sardinia and Corsica, despite their reputation for unhealthiness. They

even hid among the rocks of the seashore. The terror was so great that the

Senate agreed to everything demanded by Alaric. He was paid an enormous

indemnity which he claimed as a condition of his withdrawal.

The following year he used the same method of intimidation to force on the

people an emperor he had chosen, and to get conferred on him the title of

Prefect of the City which he had desired so long. Finally, in the year 410,

he struck the supreme blow.

The Barbarian knew what he was about, and that he did not risk much in

blockading Rome. Famine would open the gates to him sooner or later. All

who were able had left the city, especially the rich. There was no garrison

to defend it. Only a lazy populace remained behind the walls, unused to

arms, and still more enfeebled by long starvation. And yet this wretched

and decimated population, in an outburst of patriotism, resisted with

desperate energy. The siege was long. Doubtless it began before the spring;

it ended only at the end of the summer. In the night of the twenty-fourth

of August, 410, amid the glare of lightning and crashes of thunder, Alaric

entered Rome by the Salarian gate. It is certain that he only managed it

even then by treachery. The prey was handed to him.

The sack of Rome seems to have lasted for three days and three nights. Part

of the town was burned. The conquered people underwent all the horrors

which accompany such events--violent and stupid destruction, rapes, murders

of individuals, wholesale slaughter, torture, and mutilation. But in

reality the Barbarians only wanted the Roman gold. They acted like perfect

highway robbers. If they tortured their victims without distinction of age

or sex, it was to pluck the secret of their treasure-houses out of them.

It is even said that in these conditions the Roman avarice produced some

admirable examples of firmness. Some let themselves be tortured to their

last gasp rather than reveal where their treasures were hid. At last, when

Alaric decided that his army was gorged enough with spoil, he gave the

order to evacuate the city, and took to the roads with his baggage-waggons

full.

Let us be careful not to judge these doings after our modern notions. The

capture of Rome by Alaric was not a national disaster. It was plundering on

a huge scale. The Goth had no thought at all of destroying the Empire. He

was only a mercenary in rebellion--an ambitious mercenary, no doubt--but,

above all, a looter.

As a consequence of this attack on the Eternal City, one after another

caught the disease of plunder, which contaminated even the functionaries

and the subjects of Rome. Amid the general anarchy, where impunity seemed

certain, nobody restrained himself any longer. In Africa especially, where

the old instinct of piracy is always half-awake, they applied themselves to

ransack the fugitive Romans and Italians. Many rich people were come there,

seeking a place of safety in the belief that they would be more secure when

they had put the sea between themselves and the Barbarians. The report of

their riches had preceded them, exaggerated out of all measure by popular

rumour. Among them were mentioned patricians such as the Anicii, whose

property was so immense and their palaces so splendid that they could not

find purchasers. These multi-millionaires in flight were a miraculous

windfall for the country. They were bled without mercy.

Quicker than any one else, the military governor of Africa, Count

Heraclianus, was on the spot to pick the pockets of the Italian immigrants.

No sooner were they off the boat than he had very distinguished ladies

seized, and only released them when he had extorted a large ransom. He sold

those unable to pay to the Greek and Syrian slave-merchants who provided

human flesh for the Oriental harems. When the example came from such a

height, the subordinates doubtless said to themselves that they would

be very wrong to have the least shame. From one end of the province to

the other, everybody struggled to extract as much as possible from the

unfortunate fugitives. Augustin's own parishioners at Hippo undertook to

tear a donation from one of those gorgeous Anicii, whose lands stretched

further than a kite could fly--from Pinian, the husband of St. Melania

the younger. They wanted to force him to be ordained priest in spite of

himself, which, as has been explained, involved the handing over of his

goods to the Catholic community. Augustin, who opposed this, had to give in

to the crowd. There was almost a riot in the basilica.

Such were the far-off reverberations of the capture of Rome by Alaric.

Carthaginians and Numidians pillaged the Romans just like the Barbarians.

Now, how did it come about that this monstrous loot took on before the eyes

of contemporaries the magnitude of a world-catastrophe? For really nothing

was utterly lost. The Empire remained standing. After Alaric's retreat,

the Romans had come back to their city and they worked to build up the

ruins. Ere long, the populace were crying out loud that if the circus

and amphitheatre games were given back to them, they would look upon the

descent of the Goths as a bad dream.

It is no less certain that this sensational occurrence had struck the whole

Mediterranean world into a perfect stupor. It seized upon the imaginations

of all. The idea that Rome could not be taken, that it was integral and

almost sacred, had such a hold on people's minds, that they refused to

credit the sinister news. Nobody reflected that the sack of Rome by the

Barbarians should have been long ago foreseen--that Rome, deprived of

a garrison, abandoned by the Imperial army, was bound to attract the

covetousness of the Goths, and that the pillage of a place without defence,

already enfeebled by famine, was not a very glorious feat, very difficult,

or very extraordinary. People only saw the brutal fact: the Eternal City

had been captured and burned by the mercenaries. All were under the

influence of the shock caused by the narratives of the refugees. In one of

his sermons, Augustin has transmitted to us an echo of the general panic:

"Horrible things," said he, "have been told us. There have been ruins, and

fires, and rapine, and murder, and torture. That is true; we have heard it

many times; we have shuddered at all this disaster; we have often wept, and

we have hardly been able to console ourselves."

This capture of Rome was plainly a terrible warning for the future. But

party spirit strangely exaggerated the importance and meaning of the

calamity. For pagans and Christians alike it became a subject for speeches,

a commonplace of religious polemic. Both saw the event as a manifestation

of the wrath of Heaven.

"While we sacrificed to our gods," the pagan said, "Rome was standing, Rome

was happy. Now that our sacrifices are forbidden, you see what has become

of Rome...."

And they went about repeating that Christianism was responsible for the

ruin of the Empire. On their side, the Christians answered: In the first

place, Rome has not fallen: it is always standing. It has been only

chastised, and this happened because it is still half pagan. By this

frightful punishment (and they heightened the description of the horrors

committed), God has given it a warning. Let it be converted, let it return

to the virtues of its ancestors, and it will become again the mistress of

nations.

There is what Augustin and the bishops said. Still, the flock of the

faithful were only half convinced. It was all well enough to remonstrate

to them that the Christians of Rome, and even a good number of pagans,

had been spared at the name of Christ, and that the Barbarian leader had

bestowed a quite special protection and respect upon the basilicas of

the holy apostles; it was impossible to prevent their thinking that many

Christians had perished in the sack of the city, that consecrated virgins

had experienced the last outrages, and that, as a matter of fact, all the

inhabitants had been robbed of their property.... Was it thus that God

protected His chosen? What advantage was there in being Christian if they

had the same treatment as the idolaters?

This state of mind became extremely favourable for paganism to come back

again on the offensive. Since the very hard laws of Theodosius, which

forbade the worship of the ancient gods, even within the house, the pagans

had not overlooked any chance to protest against the Imperial severity.

At Carthage there were always fights in the streets between pagans and

Christians, not to say riots. In the colony of Suffetula, sixty Christians

had been massacred. The year before the capture of Rome, there had been

trouble with the pagans at Guelma. Houses belonging to the Church were

burned, a monk killed in a brawl. Whenever the Government inspection

relaxed, or the political situation appeared favourable, the pagans hurried

to proclaim their belief. Only just lately, in Rome beleaguered by Alaric,

the new consul, Tertullus, had thought fit to revive the old customs.

Before assuming office, he studied gravely the sacred fowls in their cages,

traced circles in the sky with the augur's wand, and marked the flight of

birds. Besides, a pagan oracle circulated persistently among the people,

promising that after a reign of three hundred and sixty-five years

Christianity would be conquered. The centuries of the great desolation were

fulfilled; the era of revenge was about to begin for the outcast gods.

These warlike symptoms did not escape Augustin's vigilance. His indignation

no longer arose only from the fact that paganism was so slow in dying; he

was now afraid that the feebleness of the Empire might allow it to take on

an appearance of life. It must be ended, as Donatism had been ended. The

old apostle was summoned to a new campaign, and in it he would spend the

best of his strength to the eve of his death.

II

THE CITY OF GOD

For thirteen or fourteen years, through a thousand employments and a

thousand cares, amid the panics and continual alarums which kept the

Africans on the alert in those times, Augustin worked at his \_City of God\_,

the most formidable machine of war ever directed against paganism, and also

the arsenal fullest of proofs and refutations which the disputants and

defenders of Catholicism have ever had at their disposal.

It is not for us to examine the details of this immense work, for our sole

aim is to study Augustin's soul, and we quote scarcely anything from his

books save those parts wherein a little of this ardent soul pulsates--those

which are still living for us of the twentieth century, which contain

teachings and ways of feeling still likely to move us. Now, Augustin's

attitude towards paganism is one of those which throw the greatest light on

his nature and character. And it may even yet come to be our own attitude

when we find opposed to us a conception of life and the world which

may indeed be ruined for a time, but is reborn as soon as the sense of

spirituality disappears or grows feeble.

"Immortal Paganism, art thou dead? So they say.

But Pan scoffs under his breath, and the Chimæra laughs." [1]

[Footnote 1: Sainte-Beuve.]

Like ourselves, Augustin, brought up by a Christian mother, knew it only

through literature, and, so to speak, æsthetically. Recollections of

school, the emotions and admirations of a cultivated man--there is what the

old religion meant for him. Nevertheless, he had one great advantage over

us for knowing it well: the sight of the pagan customs and superstitions

was still under his eyes.

That the lascivious, romantic, and poetic adventures of the ancient gods,

their statues, their temples, and all the arts arising from their religion,

had beguiled him and filled him with enthusiasm before his conversion, is

only too certain. But all this mythology and plastic art were looked upon

as secondary things then, even by pagans. The serious, the essential part

of the religion was not in that. Paganism, a religion of Beauty, is an

invention of our modern æsthetes; it was hardly thought of in that way in

Augustin's time.

Long before this, the Roman Varro, the great compiler of the religious

antiquities of paganism, made a threefold distinction of the doctrine

concerning the gods. The first--that of the theatre, as he calls it, or

fabulous mythology, adapted to poets, dramatists, sculptors, and jesters.

Invented by these, it is only a fantasy, a play of imagination, an ornament

of life. The third is civil theology, serious and solid, which claims the

respect and piety of all. "It is that which men in cities, and chiefly the

priests, \_ought to be\_ cunning in. It teaches which gods to worship in

public, and with what ceremonies and sacrifices each one must be served."

Finally, the second, physical or metaphysical theology, is reserved for

philosophers and exceptional minds; it is altogether theoretical. The

only important and truly religious one, which puts an obligation on the

believer, is the third--the civil theology.

Now, we never take account of this. What we persist in regarding as

paganism is what Varro himself called "a religion for the theatre"--matter

of opera, pretext for ballets, for scenery, and for dance postures.

Transposed into another key by our poets, this mythology is inflated now

and then by mysticism, or by a vague symbolism. Playthings of our pretty

wits! The living paganism, which Augustin struggled against, which crowds

defended at the price of their blood, in which the poor believed and the

wisest statesmen deemed indispensable as a safeguard of cities--that

paganism is quite another matter. Like all religions which are possible,

it implied and it \_enforced\_ not only beliefs, but ritual, sacrifices,

festivals. And this is what Augustin, with the other Christians of that

time, spurned with disgust and declared to be unbearable.

He saw, or he had seen with his own eyes, the reality of the pagan worship,

and the most repellent of all to our modern delicacy--the sacrifices. At

the period when he wrote \_The City of God\_, private sacrifices, as well as

public, were forbidden. This did not prevent the devout from breaking the

law whenever a chance offered. They hid themselves more or less when they

sacrificed before a temple, a chapel, or on some private estate. The rites

could not be carried out according to all the minute instructions of the

pontifical books. It was no more than a shadow of the ceremonies of former

times. But in his childhood, in the reign of Julian, for instance, Augustin

could have attended sacrifices which were celebrated with full pomp and

according to all the ritual forms. They were veritable scenes of butchery.

For Heaven's sake let us forget the frieze of the Parthenon, and its

sacrificers with their graceful lines! If we want to have a literal

translation of this sculpture, and find the modern representation of a

hecatomb, we must go to the slaughter-houses at La Villette.

Among the heaps of broken flesh, the puddles of blood, the mystic Julian

was attacked by a kind of drunkenness. There were never enough beasts

strangled or slaughtered to suit him. Nothing satisfied his fury for sacred

carnage. The pagans themselves made fun of this craze for sacrificing.

During the three years his reign lasted the altars streamed with blood.

Oxen by hundreds were slain upon the floors of the temples, and the

butchers throttled so many sheep and other domestic animals that they gave

up keeping count of them. Thousands of white birds, pigeons or sea-gulls,

were destroyed day by day by the piety of the prince. He was called the

\_Victimarius\_, and when he started upon his campaign against the Persians,

an epigram was circulated once more which had been formerly composed

against Marcus Aurelius (the philosophic emperor!) who was equally generous

of hecatombs: "To Marcus Cæsar from the white oxen. It will be all over

with us if you come back a conqueror." People said that Julian, on his

return, would depopulate stables and pasture-lands.

The populace, who gathered their very considerable profit from these

butcheries, naturally encouraged such an excess of devotion. At Rome, under

Caligula, more than a hundred and sixty thousand victims were immolated in

three months--nearly two thousand a day. And these massacres took place

upon the approaches of the temples; in the middle of the city; on the

forums; in narrow squares crowded with public buildings and statues. Just

try to call up the scene in summer, between walls at a white heat, with the

smells and the flies. Spectators and victims rubbed against one another,

pressed close in the restricted space. One day, Caligula, while he was

attending a sacrifice, was splashed all over by the blood of a flamingo as

they cut its neck. But the august Cæsar was not so fastidious; he himself

operated in these ceremonies armed with a mallet and clad in the short

shirt of the killers. The ignominy of all this revolted the Christians,

and whoever had nerves at all sensitive. The bloody mud in which passers

slipped, the hissing of the fat, the heavy odour of flesh, were sickening.

Tertullian held his nose before the "stinking fires" on which the victims

were roasting. And St. Ambrose complained that in the Roman Curia the

senators who were Christians were obliged to breathe in the smoke and

receive full in the face the ashes of the altar raised before the statue of

Victory.

The manipulations of the \_haruspicina\_ seemed an even worse abomination in

the eyes of the Christians. Dissection of bowels, examination of entrails,

were practices very much in fashion in all classes of society. The

pagans generally took more or less interest in magic. One was scarcely

a philosopher without being a miracle-worker. In this there was a kind

of perfidious rivalry to the Christian miracles. The ambitious or the

discontented opened the bellies of animals to learn when the Emperor was

going to die, and who would succeed him. But although it did not pretend to

magic, the \_haruspicina\_ made an essential part of the sacrifices. As soon

as the dismemberment was done, the diviners examined the appearance of

the entrails. Consulting together, they turned them over frequently with

anxious attention. This business might continue for a long time. Plutarch

relates that Philip, King of Macedonia, when sacrificing an ox on the

Ithomæa, with Aratus of Sicyon and Demetrius of Pharos, wished to inquire

out from the entrails of the victim concerning the wisdom of a piece of

strategy. The \_haruspex\_ put the smoking mass in his hands. The King shewed

it to his companions, who derived contradictory presages from it. He

listened to one side and the other, holding meanwhile the ox's entrails

in his hands. Eventually, he decided for the opinion of Aratus, and then

tranquilly gave the handful back to the sacrificer....

No doubt in Augustin's time these rites were no longer practised openly.

For all that, they were of the first importance in the ancient religion,

which desired nothing better than to restore them. It is easy to understand

the repulsion they caused in the author of \_The City of God\_. He who would

not have a fly killed to make sure of the gold crown in the contest of

poets, looked with horror on these sacred butchers, and manglers, and

cooks. He flung the garbage of the sacrifices into the sewer, and shewed

proudly to the pagans the pure oblation of the eucharistic Bread and Wine.

But what, above all, he attacked, because it was a present and permanent

scandal, was the gluttony, the drunkenness, and lust of the pagans. Let us

not exaggerate these vices--not the two first, at least. Augustin could not

judge them as we can. It is certain that the Africans of his time--and for

that matter, those of to-day--would have struck us modern people as very

sober. The outbursts of intemperance which he accuses them of only happened

at intervals, at times of public festivity or some family celebration. But

as soon as they did begin they were terrible. When one thinks of the orgies

of our Arabs behind locked doors!

But it is no less true that the pagan vices spread themselves out

cynically under the protecting shadow of religion. Popular souses of

eating and drinking were the obligatory accompaniments of the festivals

and sacrifices. A religious festival meant a carouse, loads of victuals,

barrels of wine broached in the street. These were called the Dishes,

\_Fercula\_, or else, the Rejoicing, \_Lætitia\_. The poor people, who knew

meat only by sight, ate it on these days, and they drank wine. The effect

of this unaccustomed plenty was felt at once. The whole populace were

drunk. The rich in their houses possibly did it with more ceremony, but it

was really the same brutishness. The elegant Ovid, who in the \_Art of Love\_

teaches fine manners to the beginners in love, advises them not to vomit at

table, and to avoid getting drunk like the husbands of their mistresses.

Plainly, religion was only an excuse for these excesses. Augustin goes too

far when he makes the gods responsible for this riot of sensuality. What is

true is that they did nothing to hinder it. And it is also true that the

lechery, which he flings so acridly in the face of the pagans, the gross

stage-plays, the songs, dances, and even prostitution, were all more or

less included in the essence of paganism. The theatre, like the games of

the arena and circus, was a divine institution. At certain feasts, and in

certain temples, fornication became sacred. All the world knew what took

place at Carthage in the courts and under the porticoes of the Celestial

Virgin, and what the ears of the most chaste matrons were obliged to hear,

and also what the use was of the castrated priests of the Great Mother

of the gods. Augustin, who declaims against these filthy sports, has not

forced the note of his denunciation to make out a good case. If anybody

wants to know in more detail the sights enjoyed at the theatre, or what

were the habits of certain pious confraternities, he has only to read what

is told by Apuleius, the most devout of pagans. He takes evident pleasure

in these stories, or, if he sometimes waxes indignant, it is the depravity

of men he accuses. The gods soar at a great height above these wretched

trifles. To Augustin, on the contrary, the gods are unclean devils who fill

their bellies with lust and obscenities, as if they were hankering for the

blood and grease of sacrifices.

And so he puts his finger on the open wound of paganism--its basic

immorality, or, if you like, its unmorality. Like our scientism of to-day,

it was unable to lay down a system of morals. It did not even try to. What

Augustin has written on this subject in \_The City of God\_, is perhaps the

strongest argument ever objected to polytheism. Anyhow, pages like this are

very timely indeed to consider:

"But such friends and such worshippers of those gods, whom they rejoice

to follow and imitate in all villainies and mischiefs--do they trouble

themselves about the corruption and great decay of the Republic? Not so.

Let it but stand, say they; let it but prosper by the number of its troops

and be glorious by its victories; or, \_which is best of all, let it but

enjoy security and peace\_, and what care we? Yes, what we care for above

all is that every one may have the means to increase his wealth, to pay the

expenses of his usual luxury, and that the powerful may still keep under

the weak. Let the poor crouch to the rich to be fed, or to live at ease

under their protection; let the rich abuse the poor as things at their

service, and to shew how many they have soliciting them. Let the people

applaud such as provide them with pleasures, not such as have a care for

their interests. \_Let naught that is hard be enjoined, nothing impure

be prohibited\_.... Let not subdued provinces obey their governors as

supervisors of their morality, but as masters of their fortune and the

procurers of their pleasures. What matters it if this submission has no

sincerity, but rests upon a bad and servile fear! \_Let the law protect

estates rather than fair justice\_. Let there be a good number of public

harlots, either for all that please to enjoy themselves in their company,

or for those that cannot keep private ones. Let stately and sumptuous

houses be erected, so that night and day each one according to his liking

or his means may gamble and drink and revel and vomit. Let the rhythmed

tinkling of dances be ordinary, the cries, the uncontrolled delights,

the uproar of all pleasures, even the bloodiest and most shameful in the

theatres. He who shall assay to dissuade from these pleasures, let him

be condemned as a public enemy. And if any one try to alter or suppress

them--let the people stifle his voice, let them banish him, let them

kill him. On the other hand, those that shall procure the people these

pleasures, and authorize their enjoyment, let them be eternized for the

true gods."...

However, Augustin acknowledges a number of praiseworthy minds among

pagans--those philosophers, with Plato in the first rank, who have done

their best to put morality into the religion. The Christian teacher renders

a magnificent tribute to Platonism. But these high doctrines have scarcely

got beyond the portals of the schools, and this moral teaching which

paganism vaunts of, is practically limited to the sanctuaries. "Let them

not talk," says he, "of some closely muttered instructions, taught in

secret, and whispered in the ear of a few adepts, which hold I know not

what lessons of uprightness and virtue. But let them shew the temples

ordained for such pious meetings, wherein were no sports with lascivious

gestures and loose songs.... Let them shew us the places where the gods'

doctrine was heard against covetousness, the suppression of ambition, the

bridling of luxury, and where wretches might learn what the poet Persius

thunders unto them, saying:

'Learn, wretches, and conceive the course of things,

What man is, and why nature forth him brings;...

How to use money; how to help a friend;

What we on earth, and God in us, intend.'

Let them shew where their instructing gods were used to give such lessons;

and where their worshippers used to go \_often\_ to hear these matters.

As for us, we can point to our churches, built for this sole purpose,

wheresoever the religion of Christ is diffused."

Can it surprise, then, if men so ignorant of high morality, and so deeply

embedded in matter, were also plunged in the grossest superstitions?

Materialism in morals always ends by producing a low credulity. Here

Augustin triumphs. He sends marching under our eyes, in a burlesque array,

the innumerable army of gods whom the Romans believed in. There are so many

that he compares them to swarms of gnats. Although he explains that he is

not able to mention them all, he amuses himself by stupefying us with the

prodigious number of those he discovers. Dragged into open day by him, a

whole divine population is brought out of the darkness and forgetfulness

where it had been sleeping perhaps for centuries: the little gods who work

in the fields, who make the corn grow and keep off the blight, those who

watch over children, who aid women in labour, who protect the hearth, who

guard the house. It was impossible to take a step among the pagans, to make

a movement, without the help of a god or goddess. Men and things were as if

fettered and imprisoned by the gods.

"In a house," says Augustin scoffingly, "there is but one porter. He is but

a mere man, yet he is sufficient for that office. But it takes three gods,

Forculus for the door, Cardea for the hinge, Limentinus for the threshold.

Doubtless, Forculus all alone could not possibly look after threshold, door

and hinges." And if it is a case of a man and woman retiring to the bridal

chamber after the wedding, a whole squadron of divinities are set in motion

for an act so simple and natural. "I beseech you," cries Augustin, "leave

something for the husband to do!"

This African, who had such a strong sense of the unity and fathomless

infinity of God, waxed indignant at this sacrilegious parcelling of the

divine substance. But the pagans, following Varro, would answer that it was

necessary to distinguish, among all these gods, those who were just the

imagination of poets, and those who were real beings--between the gods of

fable and the gods of religion. "Then," as Tertullian had said already,

"if the gods be chosen as onions are roped, it is obvious that what is not

chosen is condemned." "Tertullian carries his fancy too far," comments

Augustin. The gods refused as fabulous are not held reprobate on that

account. The truth is, they are a cut of the same piece as the admitted

gods. "Have not the pontiffs, like the poets, a bearded Jupiter and a

Mercury without beard?... Are the old Saturn and the young Apollo so much

the property of the poets that we do not see their statues too in the

temples?..."

And the philosophers, in their turn, however much they may protest against

the heap of fabulous gods and, like Plato and Porphyry, declare that there

exists but one God, soul of the universe, yet they no less accepted the

minor gods, and intermediaries or messengers betwixt gods and men, whom

they called demons. These hybrid beings, who pertained to humanity by their

passions, and to the divinity by the privilege of immortality, had to be

appeased by sacrifices, questioned and gratified by magic spells. And there

is what the highest pagan wisdom ended in--yes, in calling up spirits, and

the shady operations of wizards and wonder-smiths. That is what the pagans

defended, and demanded the continuation of with so much obstinacy and

fanaticism.

By no means, replied Augustin. It does not deserve to survive. It is not

the forsaking of these beliefs and superstitious practices which has

brought about the decay of the Empire. If you are asking for the temples

of your gods to be opened, it is because they are easy to your passions.

At heart, you scoff at them and the Empire; all you want is freedom and

impunity for your vices. There we have the real cause of the decadence!

Little matter the idle grimaces before altars and statues. Become chaste,

sober, brave, and poor, as your ancestors were. Have children, agree to

compulsory military service, and you will conquer as they did. Now, all

these virtues are enjoined and encouraged by Christianity. Whatever certain

heretics may say, the religion of Christ is not contrary to marriage or the

soldier's profession. The Patriarchs of the old law were blest in marriage,

and there are just and holy wars.

And even supposing, that in spite of all efforts to save it, the Empire is

condemned, must we therefore despair? We should be prepared for the end

of the Roman city. Like all the things of this world, it is liable to old

age and death. It will die then, one day. Far from being cast down, let

us strengthen ourselves against this disaster by the realization of the

eternal. Let us strengthen our hold upon that which passes not. Above the

earthly city, rises the City of God, which is the communion of holy souls,

the only one which gives complete and never-failing joy. Let us try to be

the citizens of that city, and to live the only life worth calling life.

For the life here below is but the shadow of a shadow....

The people of those times were wonderfully prepared to hearken to such

exhortations. On the eve of the Barbarian invasions, these Christians, for

whom the dogma of the Resurrection was perhaps the chief reason of their

faith, these people, sick at heart, who looked on in torture at the ending

of a world, must have considered this present life as a bad dream, from

which there should be no delay in escaping.

At the very moment even that Augustin began to write \_The City of God\_, his

friend Evodius, Bishop of Uzalis, told him this story.

He had as secretary a very young man, the son of a priest in the

neighbourhood. This young man had begun by obtaining a post as stenographer

in the office of the Proconsul of Africa. Evodius, who was alarmed at what

might happen to his virtue in such surroundings, having first made certain

of his absolute chastity, offered to take him into his service. In the

bishop's house, where he had scarcely anything to do but read the Holy

Scripture, his faith became so enthusiastic that he longed for nothing now

but death. To go out of this life, "to be with Christ," was his eager wish.

It was heard. After sixteen days of illness he died in the house of his

parents.

"Now, two days after his funeral, a virtuous woman of Figes, a servant of

God, a widow for twelve years, had a dream, and in her dream she saw a

deacon who had been dead some four years, together with men, and women too,

virgins and widows--she saw these servants of God getting ready a palace.

This dwelling was so rich that it shone with light, and you would have

believed it was all made of silver. And when the widow asked whom these

preparations were for, the deacon replied that they were for a young man,

dead the evening before, the son of a priest. In the same palace, she saw

an old man, all robed in white, and he told two other persons, also robed

in white, to go to the tomb of this young man, and lift out the body, and

carry it to Heaven. When the body had been drawn from the tomb and carried

to Heaven, there arose (said she) out of the tomb a bush of virgin-roses,

which are thus named because they never open...."

So the son of the priest had chosen the better part. What was the good of

remaining in this abominable world, where there was always a risk of being

burned or murdered by Goths and Vandals, when, in the other world, angels

were preparing for you palaces of light?

III

THE BARBARIAN DESOLATION

Augustin was seventy-two years old when he finished the \_City of God\_. This

was in 426. That year, an event of much importance occurred at Hippo, and

the report of it was inserted in the public acts of the community.

"The sixth of the calends of October," \_The Acts\_ set forth, "the very

glorious Theodosius being consul for the twelfth time, and Valentinian

Augustus for the second, Augustin the bishop, accompanied by Religianus

and Martinianus, his fellow-bishops, having taken his place in the

Basilica of Peace at Hippo, and the priests Saturnius, Leporius, Barnaby,

Fortunatianus, Lazarus, and Heraclius, being present, with all the clergy

and a vast crowd of people--Augustin the bishop said:

"'Let us without delay look to the business which I declared yesterday to

your charity, and for which I desired you to gather here in large numbers,

as I see you have done. If I were to talk to you of anything else, you

might be less attentive, seeing the expectation you are in.

"'My brothers, we are all mortal in this life, and no man knows his last

day. God willed that I should come to dwell in this town in the force of my

age. But, as I was a young man then--see, I am old now, and as I know that

at the death of bishops, peace is troubled by rivalry or ambition (this

have I often seen and bewailed it)--I ought, so far as it rests with me, to

turn away so great a mischief from your city.... I am going then to tell

you that my will, which I believe also to be the will of God, is that I

have as successor the priest Heraclius.'

"At these words all the people cried out:

"'Thanks be to God! Praise be to Christ!'

"And this cry they repeated three-and-twenty times.

"'Christ, hear us! Preserve us Augustin!'

"This cry they repeated sixteen times.

"'Be our father! Be our bishop!'

"This cry they repeated eight times.

"When the people became silent, the bishop Augustin spoke again in these

words:

"'There is no need for me to praise Heraclius. As much as I do justice

to his wisdom, in equal measure should I spare his modesty.... As you

perceive, the secretaries of the church gather up what we say and what you

say. My words and your shouts do not fall to the ground. To put it briefly,

these are ecclesiastical decrees that we are now drawing up, and I desire

by these means, as far as it is in the power of man, to confirm what I have

declared to you.'

"Here the people cried out:

"'Thanks be to God! Praise be to Christ!'

\* \* \* \* \*

"'Be our father, and let Heraclius be our bishop!'

"When silence was made again, Augustin the bishop thus spoke:

"'I understand what you would say. But I do not wish that it happen to him

as it happened to me. Many of you know what was done at that time.... I was

consecrated bishop during the lifetime of my father and bishop, the aged

Valerius, of blessed memory, and with him I shared the see. I was ignorant,

as he was, that this was forbidden by the Council of Nice. I would not

therefore that men should blame in Heraclius, my son, what they blamed in

me.'

"With that the people cried out thirteen times:

"'Thanks be to God! Praise be to Christ!'

"After a little silence, Augustin the bishop said again:

"'So he will remain a priest till it shall please God for him to be a

bishop. But with the aid and mercy of Christ, I shall do in future what up

to now I have not been able to do.... You will remember what I wanted to

do some years ago, and you have not allowed me. For a work upon the Holy

Scriptures, with which my brothers and my fathers the bishops had deigned

to charge me in the two Councils of Numidia and Carthage, \_I was not to be

disturbed by anybody during five days of the week\_. That was a thing agreed

upon between you and me. The act was drawn up, and you all approved of

it after hearing it read. But your promise did not last long. I was soon

encroached upon and overrun by you all. I am no longer free to study as I

desire. Morning and afternoon, I am entangled in your worldly affairs. I

beg of you and supplicate you in Christ's name to suffer me to shift the

burthen of all these cares upon this young man, the priest Heraclius, whom

I signal, in His name, as my successor in the bishopric.'

"Upon this the people cried out six-and-twenty times:

"'We thank thee for thy choice!'

"And the people having become silent, Augustin the bishop said:

"'I thank you for your charity and goodwill, or rather, I thank God for

them. So, my brothers, you will address yourselves to Heraclius upon all

the points you are used to submit to me. Whenever he needs counsel, my care

and my help will not be wanting.... In this way, without any loss to you,

I shall be able to devote the remainder of life which it may please God

still to leave me, not to laziness and rest, but to the study of the Holy

Scriptures. This work will be useful to Heraclius, and hence to yourselves.

Let nobody then envy my leisure, for this leisure will be very busy....

"'It only remains for me to ask you, at least those who can, to sign these

acts. Your agreement I cannot do without; so kindly let me learn it by your

voices.'

"At these words the people shouted:

"'Let it be so! Let it be so!'

\* \* \* \* \*

"When all there became silent, Augustin the bishop made an end, saying:

"'It is well. Now let us fulfil our duty to God. While we offer Him the

Sacrifice, and during this hour of supplication, I would urge of your

charity to lay aside all business and personal cares, and to pray the Lord

God for this church, for me, and for the priest Heraclius.'"

The dryness and official wording of the document do not succeed in stifling

the vividness and colour of this crowded scene. Through the piety of the

formal cries, it is easy to see that Augustin's hearers were hard to

manage. This flock, which he loved and scolded so much, was no easier to

lead now than when he first became bishop. Truly it was no sinecure to rule

and administrate the diocese of Hippo! The bishop was literally the servant

of the faithful. Not only had he to feed and clothe them, to spend his time

over their business and quarrels and lawsuits, but he belonged to them body

and soul. They kept a jealous eye on the employment of his time; if he

went away, they asked for an explanation. Whenever Augustin went to preach

at Carthage or Utica, he apologized to his own people. And before he can

undertake a commentary on the Scriptures, a commentary, moreover, which he

has been asked by two Councils to prepare, he must get their permission,

or, at any rate, their agreement.

At last, at seventy-two years old, after he had been a bishop for

thirty-one years, he got their leave to take a little rest. But what a

rest! He himself said: "This leisure will be very busy"--this leisure which

is going to fill the five holidays in the week. He intends to study and

fathom the Scripture, and this, besides, to the profit of his people and

clergy and the whole Church. It is the fondest dream of his life--the

plan he was never able to realize. All that, at first sight, astonishes

us. We ask ourselves, "What else had he been doing up to this time in his

treatises and letters and sermons, in all that sea of words and writings

which his enemies threw up at him, if he was not studying and explaining

the Holy Scriptures?" The fact is, that in most of these writings and

sermons he elucidates the truth only in part, or else he is confuting

heresiarchs. What he wanted to do was to study the truth for its own sake,

without having to think of and be hindered by the exposure of errors; and

above all, to seize it in all its breadth and all its depths, to have

done with this blighting and irritating eristic, and to reflect in a vast

\_Mirror\_ the whole and purest light of the sacred dogmas.

He never found the time for it. He had to limit himself to a handbook

of practical morals, published under this title before his death, and

now lost. Once more the heresiarchs prevented him from leading a life of

speculation. During his last years, amid the cruellest anxieties, he had

to battle with the enemies of Grace and the enemies of the Trinity, with

Arius and Pelagius. Pelagius had found an able disciple in a young Italian

bishop, Julian of Eclanum, who was a formidable opponent to the aged

Augustin. As for Arianism, which had seemed extinguished in the West, here

it was given a new life by the Barbarian invasion.

It was a grave moment for Catholicism, as it was for the Empire. The Goths,

the Alani, and the Vandals, after having laid waste Gaul and Spain, were

taking measures to pass over into Africa. Should they renew the attempts

of Alaric and Radagaisus against Italy, they would soon be masters of the

entire Occident. Now these Barbarians were Arians. Supposing (and it seemed

more and more likely) that Africa and Italy were vanquished after Gaul and

Spain, then it was all over with Western Catholicism. For the invaders

carried their religion in their baggage, and forced it on the conquered.

Augustin, who had cherished the hope of equalling the earthly kingdom

of Christ to that of the Cæsars, was going to see the ruin of both.

His terrified imagination exaggerated still more the only too real and

threatening peril. He must have lived hours of agony, expecting a disaster.

If only the truth might be saved, might swim in this sea of errors which

spread like a flood in the wake of the Barbarian onflow! It was from this

wish, no doubt, that sprang the tireless persistence which the old bishop

put into a last battle with heresy. If he selected Pelagius specially to

fall upon with fury, if he forced his principles to their last consequences

in his theory of Grace, the dread of the Barbarian peril had perhaps

something to do with it. This soul, so mild, so moderate, so tenderly

human, promulgated a pitiless doctrine which does not agree with his

character. But he reasoned, no doubt, that it was impossible to drive

home too hard the need of the Redemption and the divinity of the Redeemer

in front of these Arians, these Pelagians, these enemies of Christ, who

to-morrow perhaps would be masters of the Empire.

Therefore, Augustin continued to write, and discuss, and disprove. There

came a time when he had to think of fighting otherwise than with the pen.

His life, the lives of his flock, were threatened. He had to see to the

bodily defence of his country and city. The fact was, that some time

before the great drive of the Vandals, forerunners of them, in the shape

of hordes of African Barbarians, had begun to lay waste the provinces. The

Circoncelliones were not dead, nor their good friends the Donatists either.

These sectaries, encouraged by the widespread anarchy, came out of their

hiding-places and shewed themselves more insolent and aggressive than ever.

Possibly they hoped for some effective support against the Roman Church

from the Arian Vandals who were drawing near, or at least a recognition of

what they believed to be their rights. Day after day, bands of Barbarians

were landing from Spain. In the rear of these wandering troops of brigands

or irregular soldiers, the old enemies of the Roman peace and civilization,

the Nomads of the South, the Moors of the Atlas, the Kabylian mountaineers,

flung themselves upon country and town, pillaging, killing, and burning

everything that got in their way. All was laid desolate. "Countries but

lately prosperous and populated have been changed into solitudes," said

Augustin.

At last, in the spring of the year 429, the Vandals and the Alani, having

joined forces on the Spanish coast under their King, Genseric, crossed

the Straits of Gibraltar. It was devastation on a large scale this time.

An army of eighty thousand men set themselves methodically to plunder the

African provinces. Cherchell, which had already been sorely tried during

the revolt of Firmus the Moor, was captured again and burned. All the towns

and fortified places on the coast fell, one after another. Constantine

alone, from the height of its rock, kept the invaders at bay. To starve out

those who fled from towns and farms and took refuge in the fastnesses of

the Atlas, the Barbarians destroyed the harvest, burned the grain-houses,

and cut down the vines and fruit trees. And they set fire to the forests

which covered the slopes of the mountains, to force the refugees out of

their hiding-places.

This stupid ravaging was against the interest of the Vandals themselves,

because they were injuring the natural riches of Africa, the report of

which had brought them there. Africa was for them the land of plenty, where

people could drink more wine than they wanted and eat wheaten bread. It was

the country where life was comfortable, easy, and happy. It was the granary

of the Mediterranean, the great supply-store of Rome. But their senseless

craving for gold led them to ruin provinces, in which, nevertheless, they

counted upon settling. They behaved in Africa as they had behaved in Rome

under Alaric. By way of tearing gold out of the inhabitants, they tortured

them as they had tortured the wealthy Romans. They invented worse ones.

Children, before their parents' eyes, were sliced in two like animals in a

slaughterhouse. Or else their skulls were smashed against the pavements and

walls of houses.

The Church was believed to be very rich; and perhaps, as it had managed

to comprise in its domains the greatest part of the landed estates, it

was upon it chiefly that the Barbarians flung themselves. The priests and

bishops were tortured with unheard-of improvements of cruelty. They were

dragged in the rear of the army like slaves, so that heavy ransoms might

be extracted from the faithful in exchange for their pastors. They were

obliged to carry the baggage like the camels and mules, and when they gave

out the Barbarians prodded them with lances. Many sank down beside the

road and never rose more. But it is certain that fanaticism added to the

covetousness and ferocity of the Vandals. These Arians bore a special

grudge against Catholicism, which was, besides, in their eyes, the religion

of the Roman domination. This is why they made their chief attacks on

basilicas, convents, hospitals, and all the property of the Church. And

throughout the country public worship was stopped.

In Hippo, these atrocities were known before the Barbarians arrived. The

people must have awaited them and prepared to receive them with gloomy

resignation. Africa had not been tranquil for a century. After the risings

of Firmus and Gildo, came the lootings of the southern Nomads and the

Berber mountaineers. And it was not so long since the Circoncelliones were

keeping people constantly on the alert. But this time everybody felt that

the great ruin was at hand. They were stunned by the news that some town

or fortified place had been captured by the Vandals, or that some farm or

villa in the neighbourhood was on fire.

Amid the general dismay, Augustin did his best to keep calm. He, indeed,

saw beyond the material destruction, and at every new rumour of massacre

or burning he would repeat to his clerics and people the words of the Wise

Man:

"Doth the firm of heart grieve to see fall the stones and beams, and death

seize the children of men?"

They accused him of being callous. They did not understand him. While all

about him mourned the present misfortunes, he was already lamenting over

the evil to come, and this clear-sightedness pained him more than the shock

of the daily horrors committed by the Barbarians. His disciple Possidius,

the Bishop of Guelma, who was with him in these sad days, naively applied

to him the saying out of \_Ecclesiastes\_: "In much wisdom is much grief."

Augustin did really suffer more than others, because he thought more

profoundly on the disaster. He foresaw that Africa was going to be lost to

the Empire, and consequently to the Church. They were bound together in his

mind. What was there to do against brutal strength? All the eloquence and

all the charity in the world would be as nothing against that unchained

elemental mass of Vandals. It was as impossible to convert the Barbarians

as it had been to convert the Donatists. Force was the only resource

against force.

Then in despair the man of God turned once more to Cæsar. The monk appealed

to the soldier. He charged Boniface, Count of Africa, to save Rome and the

Church.

This Boniface, a rather ambiguous personage, was a fine type of the

swashbuckler and official of the Lower-Empire. Thracian by origin, he

joined the trickery of the Oriental to all the vices of the Barbarian. He

was strong, clever in all bodily exercises like the soldiers of those days,

overflowing with vigour and health, and even brave at times. In addition,

he was fond of wine and women, and ate and drank like a true pagan. He

was married twice, and after his second marriage he kept in the sight and

knowledge of everybody a harem of concubines. He was sent, first of all,

to Africa as a Tribune--that is to say, as Commissioner of the Imperial

Government, probably to carry out the decrees of Honorius against the

Donatists; and ere long he was made commander of the military forces of the

province, with the title of Count.

In reality, while seeming to protect the country, he set himself to plunder

it, as the tradition was among the Roman officials. His \_officium\_, still

more grasping than himself, persuaded him to deeds which the Bishop of

Hippo, who was, however, anxious to remain on the right side of him,

protested against by hints. Boniface was obliged to overlook much robbery

and pillage on the part of his subordinates so as to keep them faithful.

Moreover, he himself stole. He was bound to close his eyes to the

depredations of others, that his own might be winked at. Once become the

accomplice of this band of robbers, he had no longer the authority to

control them.

How did Augustin ever believe in the goodwill and good faith of this

adventurer full of coarse passions, so far as to put his final hopes in

him? Augustin knew men very well; he could detect low and hypocritical

natures at a distance. How came it that he was taken in by Boniface?

Well, Augustin wanted his support, first of all, when he came as Imperial

Commissioner to Carthage to bring the Donatists into line. Generally, we

see only the good points of people who do us good turns. Besides, in order

to propitiate the bishop, and the devout Court at Ravenna, the Tribune

advertised his great zeal in favour of Catholicism. His first wife, a very

pious woman whom he seems to have loved much, encouraged him in this.

When she died, he was so overcome by despair that he took refuge in the

extremest practices of religion--and in this, perhaps, he was quite

sincere. It is also possible that he was becoming discredited at Ravenna,

where they must have known about his oppressions and suspected his

ambitious intrigues. Anyhow, whether he was really disgusted with the

world, or whether he deemed it prudent to throw a little oblivion over

himself just then, he spoke on all hands of resigning his post and living

in retreat like a monk. It was just at this moment that Augustin and

Alypius begged him not to desert the African army.

They met the Commander-in-Chief at Thubunæ, in Southern Numidia, where,

no doubt, he was reducing the Nomads. We must remark once more Augustin's

energy in travelling, to the very eve of his death. It was a long and

dangerous road from Hippo to Thubunæ. Before making up his mind to so much

fatigue, the old bishop must have judged the situation to be very serious.

At Thubunæ, was Boniface playing a game, or was he, indeed, so crushed by

his grief that the world had become unbearable and he pondered genuine

thoughts of changing his way of life? What is sure is, that he gave the

two prelates the most edifying talk. When they heard the Count of Africa

speaking with unction of the cloister and of his desire to retire there,

they were a little astonished at so much piety in a soldier. Besides,

these excellent resolutions were most inconvenient for their plans. They

remonstrated with him that it was quite possible to save one's soul in

the army, and quoted the example of David, the warrior king. They ended

by telling him all the expectations they founded upon his resource and

firmness. They begged him to protect the churches and convents against

fresh attacks of the Donatists, and especially against the Barbarians of

Africa. These were at this moment breaking down all the old defence lines

and laying waste the territories of the Empire.

Boniface allowed himself to be easily convinced--promised whatever he was

asked. But he never budged. From now on, his conduct becomes most singular.

He is in command of all the military strength of the province, and he takes

no steps to suppress the African looters. It would seem as if he only

thought of filling the coffers of himself and his friends. The country was

so systematically scoured by them that, as Augustin said, there was nothing

more left to take.

This inactivity lent colour to the rumours of treason. Nor is it impossible

that he had cherished a plan from the beginning of his command to cut out

an independent principality for himself in Africa. Was this the reason that

he dealt softly with the native tribes, so as to make certain of their help

in case of a conflict with the Imperial army? However that may be, his

behaviour was not frank. Some years later, he landed on the Spanish coast

to war against the Vandals under the command of the Prefect Castinus, and

there he married a Barbarian princess who was by religion an Arian. It

is true that the new Countess of Africa became a convert to Catholicism.

But her first child was baptized by Arian priests, who rebaptized, at the

same time, the Catholic slaves of Boniface's household. This marriage

with a Vandal, these concessions to Arianism, gave immense scandal to the

orthodox. Rumours of treason began to float about again.

No doubt Boniface took great advantage of his fidelity to the Empress

Placidia. But he was standing between the all-powerful Barbarians and the

undermined Empire. He wanted to remain on good terms with both, and then,

when the hour came, to go over to the stronger. This double-faced diplomacy

caused his downfall. His rival Aëtius accused him of high treason before

Placidia. The Court of Ravenna declared him an enemy of the Empire, and an

army was sent against him. Boniface did not hesitate; he went into open

rebellion against Rome.

Augustin was thunderstruck by his desertion. But what way was there to make

this violent man listen to reason, who had at least the appearances of

right on his side, since there was a chance they had slandered him to the

Empress, and who thought it quite natural to take vengeance on his enemies?

His recent successes had still more intoxicated him. He had just defeated

the two generals who had been sent to reduce him, and he was accordingly

master of the situation in Africa. What was he going to do? The worst

resolutions were to be feared from this conqueror, all smarting, and hungry

for revenge.... Nevertheless, Augustin resolved to write to him. His letter

is a masterpiece of tact, of prudence, and also of Christian and episcopal

firmness.

It would have been dangerous to declare to this triumphant rebel: "You are

in the wrong. Your duty is to submit to the Emperor, your master." Boniface

was quite capable of answering: "What are you interfering for? Politics are

no business of yours. Look after your Church!" This is why Augustin very

cleverly speaks to him from beginning to end of his letter simply as a

bishop, eager for the salvation of a very dear son in Jesus Christ. And so,

by keeping strictly to his office of spiritual director, he gained his end

more surely and entirely; and, as a doctor of souls, he ventured to remind

Boniface of certain truths which he would never have dared to mention as

counsellor.

According to Augustin, the disgrace of the Count, and the evils which

this event had brought on Africa, came principally from his attachment to

worldly benefits. It was the ambition and covetousness of himself and his

followers which had done all the harm. Let him free himself from perishable

things, let him prevent the thefts and plundering of those under him.

Let him, who some time ago wished to live in perfect celibacy, now keep

at least to his wife and no other. Finally, let him remember his sworn

allegiance. Augustin did not mean to go into the quarrel between Boniface

and Placidia, and he gave no opinion as to the grievances of either. He

confined himself to saying to the general in rebellion: "If you have

received so many benefits from the Roman Empire, do not render evil for

good. If, on the other hand, you have received evil, do not render evil for

evil."

It is clear that the Bishop of Hippo could scarcely have given any other

advice to the Count of Africa. To play the part of political counsellor

in the very entangled state of affairs was extremely risky. How was it

possible to exhort a victorious general to lay down his arms before

the conquered? And yet, in estimating the situation from the Christian

standpoint alone, Augustin had found a way to say everything essential, all

that could profitably be said at the moment.

How did Boniface take a letter which was, in the circumstances, so

courageous? What we know is that he did not alter his plans. It would

indeed have been very difficult for him to withdraw and yield; and more

than ever since a new army under Sigisvultus had been sent against him in

all haste. A real fatality compelled him to remain in revolt against Rome.

Did he believe he was ruined, as has been stated, or else, through his

family connections--let us remember that his wife was a Barbarian--had he

been for a long time plotting with Genseric to divide Africa? He has been

accused of that. What comes out is, that as soon as he heard of the arrival

of Sigisvultus and the new expeditionary force, he called in the Vandals to

his aid. This was the great invasion of 429.

Ere long, the Barbarians entered Numidia. The borderlands about Hippo were

threatened. Stricken with terror, the inhabitants in a mass fled before the

enemy, leaving the towns empty. Those who were caught in them rushed into

the churches, imploring the bishops and priests to help them. Or else,

giving up all hope of life, they cried out to be baptized, confessed,

did penance in public. The Vandals, as we have seen, aimed specially at

the clergy; they believed that the Catholic priests were the soul of the

resistance. Should not these priests, then, in the very interest of the

Church, save themselves for quieter times, and escape the persecution by

flight? Many sheltered themselves behind the words of Christ: "When they

persecute you in this city, flee ye into another."

But Augustin strongly condemned the cowardliness of the deserters. In a

letter addressed to his fellow-bishop, Honoratus, and intended to be read

by all the clergy in Africa, he declares that bishops and priests should

not abandon their churches and dioceses, but stay at their post till the

end--till death and till martyrdom--to fulfil the duties of their ministry.

If the faithful were able to withdraw into a safe place, their pastors

might accompany them; if not, they should die in the midst of them. Thus

they would have at least the consolation of lending aid to the dying in

their last moments, and especially of preventing the apostasies which

readily took place under the shock of the terror. For Augustin, who foresaw

the future, the essential thing was that later, when the Vandal wave had

swept away, Catholicism might flourish again in Africa. To this end, the

Catholics must be made to remain in the country, and the greatest possible

number be strengthened in their faith. Otherwise, the work of three

centuries would have to be done all over again.

We must admire this courage and clear-mindedness in an old man of

seventy-five, who was being continually harassed by the complaints and

lamentations of a crowd of demoralized fugitives. The position became more

and more critical. The siege lines were drawing closer. But in the midst of

all this dread, Augustin was given a gleam of hope: Boniface made his peace

with the Empire. Henceforward, his army, turning against the Barbarians,

might protect Hippo and perhaps save Africa.

Had Augustin a hand in this reconciliation? There is not the least doubt

that he desired it most earnestly. In a letter to Count Darius, the

special envoy sent from Ravenna to treat with the rebel general, he warmly

congratulates the Imperial plenipotentiary on his mission of peace. "You

are sent," he said to him, "to stop the shedding of blood. Therefore

rejoice, illustrious and very dear son in Jesus Christ, rejoice in this

great and real blessing, and rejoice upon it in the Lord, Who has made you

what you are, and entrusted to you a task so beautiful and important. May

God seal the good work He has done for us through you!" ... And Darius

answered: "May you be spared to pray such prayers for the Empire and the

Roman State a long time yet, my Father."

But the Empire was lost in Africa. If the reconciliation of the rebellious

Count had given some illusions to Augustin, they did not last long.

Boniface, having failed in his endeavours to negotiate the retreat of the

Vandals, was defeated by Genseric, and obliged to fall back into Hippo with

an army of mercenary Goths. Thus it came about that Barbarians held against

other Barbarians one of the last Roman citadels in Africa. From the end of

May, 430, Hippo was blockaded on the land side and on the side of the sea.

In great tribulation, Augustin resigned himself to this supreme

humiliation, and to all the horrors which would have to be endured if the

city were captured. As a Christian, he left all to the will of God, and

he would repeat to those about him the words of the Psalm: "Righteous art

Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgments." A number of fugitive priests,

and among them Possidius, Bishop of Guelma, had taken refuge in the

episcopal residence. One day, when he lost heart, Augustin, who was at

table with them, said:

"In front of all these disasters, I ask God to deliver this city from the

siege, or, if that be not His decree, to give His servants the necessary

strength to do His will, or at least to take me from this world and receive

me into His bosom."

But it is more than probable that discouragement of that kind was

only momentary with him, and that in his sermons, as well as in his

conversations with Boniface, he did his utmost to stimulate the courage of

the people and the general. His correspondence includes a series of letters

written about this time to the Count of Africa, which manifest here and

there a very warlike spirit. These letters are most certainly apocryphal.

Yet they do reveal something of what must have been the sentiments just

then of the people of Hippo and of Augustin himself. One of these letters

emphatically congratulates Boniface upon an advantage gained over the

Barbarians.

"Your Excellency knows, I believe, that I am stretched upon my bed, and

that I long for my last day to come. I am overjoyed at your victory. I urge

you to save the Roman city. Rule your soldiers like a good Count. Do not

trust too much to your own strength. Put your glory in Him Who gives

courage, and you will never fear any enemy. Farewell!"

The words do not matter much. Whatever may have been Augustin's last

farewell to the defender of Hippo, it was no doubt couched in language not

unlike this. In any case, posterity has wished to believe that the dying

bishop maintained to the end his unyielding demeanour face to face with the

Barbarians. It would be a misuse of words to represent him as a patriot

in the present sense of the term. It is no less true that this African,

this Christian, was an admirable servant of Rome. Until his death he kept

his respect for it, because in his eyes the Empire meant order, peace,

civilization, the unity of faith in the unity of rule.

IV

SAINT AUGUSTIN

In the third month of the siege, he fell ill. He had a fever--no doubt an

infectious fever. The country people, the wounded soldiers who had taken

refuge in Hippo after the rout of Boniface, must have brought in the germs

of disease. It was, moreover, the end of August, the season of epidemics,

of damp heats and oppressive evenings, the time of the year most dangerous

and trying for sick people.

All at once, Augustin took to his bed. But even there, upon the bed in

which he was going to die, he was not left in quiet. People came to ask his

prayers for some possessed by devils. The old bishop was touched; he wept

and asked God to give him this grace, and the devils went out of those poor

crazy men. This cure, as may well be thought, made a great noise in the

city. A man brought him another one sick to be healed. Augustin, being most

weary, said to the man:

"My son, you see the state I am in. If I had any power over illnesses, I

should begin by curing myself."

But the man had no idea of being put off: he had had a dream. A mysterious

voice had said to him, "Go and see Augustin: he will put his hands on the

sick person, who will rise up cured." And, in fact, he did. I think these

are the only miracles the saint made in his life. But what matters that,

when the continual miracle of his charity and his apostolate is considered?

Soon the bishop's illness grew worse. Eventually, he succeeded in

persuading them not to disturb him any more, and that they would let him

prepare for death in silence and recollection. During the ten days that

he still lingered, nobody entered his cell save the physicians, and the

servants who brought him a little food. He availed himself of the quiet to

repent of his faults. For he was used to say to his clergy that "even after

baptism, Christians--nay, priests, however holy they might be, ought never

go out of life without having made a general confession." And the better

to rouse his contrition, he had desired them to copy out on leaves the

Penitential Psalms, and to put these leaves on the wall of his room. He

read them continually from his pillow.

Here, then, he is alone with himself and God. A solemn moment for the great

old man!

He called up his past life, and what struck him most, and saddened him, was

the foundering of all his human hopes. The enemies of the Church, whom he

had battled with almost without ceasing for forty years, and had reason to

believe conquered--all these enemies were raising their heads: Donatists,

Arians, Barbarians. With the Barbarians' help, the Arians were going to be

the masters of Africa. The churches, reformed at the price of such long

efforts, would be once more destroyed. And see now! the authority which

might have supported them, which he had perhaps too much relied upon--well,

the Empire was sinking too. It was the end of order, of substantial peace,

of that minimum of safety which is indispensable for all spiritual effort.

From one end to the other of the Western world, Barbarism triumphed.

Sometimes, amid these sad thoughts of the dying man, the clangour of

clarions blared out--there was a call to arms on the ramparts. And these

musics came to him in his half-delirious state very mournfully, like the

trumpets proclaiming the Judgment Day. Yes, it might well be feared that

the Day of Wrath was here! Was it really the end of the world, or only the

end of a world?... Truly, there were then enough horrors and calamities to

make people think of the morrow with dismay. Many of the signs predicted

by Scripture dazed the imagination: desolations, wars, persecutions of the

Church, increased with terrific steadiness and cruelty. Yet all the signs

foretold were not there. How many times already had humanity been deceived

in its fear and its hope! In reality, though all seemed to shew that the

end of time was drawing nigh, no one could tell the day nor the hour of

the Judgment. Hence, men should watch always, according to the words of

Christ.... But if this trial of Barbarian war was to pass like the others,

how woeful it was while it endured! How hard for Augustin, above all, who

saw nearly the whole of his work thrown down.

One thought at least consoled him, that since his conversion, for forty

years and more, he had done all he was able--he had worked for Christ

even beyond his strength. He said to himself that he left behind him the

fruit of a huge labour, a whole body of doctrine and apology which would

safeguard against error whatever was left of his flock and of the African

Church. He himself had founded a Church which might serve as an example,

his dear Church of Hippo, that he had done his best to fashion after the

divine plan. And he had also founded convents, and a library full of books,

which had become still larger recently through the generosity of Count

Darius. He had lessoned his clergy who, once the disasters were past, would

scatter the good seed of Truth. Books, monasteries, priests, a sure and

solid nourishment for the mind, shelters and guides for souls--there is

what he bequeathed to the workers of the future. And with a little joy

mingling with his sorrow, he read on the corner of the wall where his bed

was, this verse of the Psalm: \_Exibit homo ad opus suum et operationem suam

usque ad vesperum\_--"Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until

the evening." He, too, had worked until evening.

If the earthly reward seemed to slip from him now, if all was sinking

around him, if his episcopal city was beleaguered, if he himself, although

still a strong man--"he had the use of all his limbs," says Possidius;

"a keen ear and perfect sight"--if he himself was dying too soon, it was

doubtless in expiation for the sins of his youth. At this remembrance of

his disorders, the tears fell over his face.... And yet, however wild had

been his conduct at that time, he could descry in it the sure marks of his

vocation. He recalled the despair and tears of his mother, but also his

enthusiasm when he read the \_Hortensius\_; his disgust for the world and

all things when he lost his friend. In the old man he recognized the new.

And he said to himself: "Nay! but that was myself. I have not changed. I

have only found myself. I have only changed my ways. In my youth, in the

strongest time of my mistakes, I had already risen to turn to Thee, my

God!"

His worst foolishness had been the desire to understand all things. He had

failed in humility of mind. Then God had given him the grace to submit his

intelligence to the faith. He had believed, and then he had understood, as

well as he could, as much as he could. In the beginning, he acknowledged

very plainly that he did not understand. And then faith had thrown open

the roads of understanding. He had splendidly employed his reason, within

the limits laid down against mortal weakness. Had that not been the proud

desire of his youth? To understand! What greater destiny?

To love also. After he had freed himself from carnal passions, he had much

employed his heart. He thought of all the charity he had poured out upon

his people and the Church, upon all he had loved in God--upon all he had

done, upon all the consequence of his labour, inspired and strengthened by

the divine love.... Yes, to love--all was in that! Let the Barbarians come!

Had not Christ said: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the

world"? So long as there shall be two men gathered together for love of

Him, the world will not be entirely lost, the Church and civilization will

be saved. The religion of Christ is a leaven of action, understanding,

sacrifice, and charity. If the world be not at this hour already condemned,

if the Day of Judgment be still far off, it is from this religion that

shall arise the new influences of the future....

And so Augustin forgot his sufferings and his human disappointments in

the thought that, in spite of all, the Church is eternal. The City of God

gathered in the wreckage of the earthly city: "The Goth cannot capture what

Christ protects"--\_Non tollit Gothus quod custodit Christus\_. And as his

sufferings increased, he turned all his thoughts on this unending City,

"where we rest, where we see, where we love," where we find again all the

beloved ones who have gone away. All--he called them all in this supreme

moment: Monnica, Adeodatus, and her who had nearly lost herself for him,

and all those he had held dear....

On the fifth day of the calends of September, Augustin, the bishop,

was very low. They were praying for him in the churches at Hippo, and

especially in the Basilica of Peace, where he had preached and worked for

others so long. Possidius of Guelma was in the bishop's room, and the

priests and monks. They sent up their prayers with those of the dying man.

And no doubt they sang for the last time before him one of those liturgical

chants which long ago at Milan had touched him even to tears, and now,

since the siege, in the panic caused by the Barbarians, they dared not sing

any more. Augustin, guarding himself even now against the too poignant

sweetness of the melody, attended only to the sense of the words. And he

said:

"My soul thirsts after the living God. When shall I appear before His

face?"

Or again:

"He Who is Life has come down into this world. He has suffered our death,

and He has caused it to die by the fullness of His life.... Life has come

down to you--and will you not ascend towards Him and live?..."

He was passing into Life and into Glory. He was going very quietly, amid

the chanting of hymns and the murmur of prayers.... Little by little his

eyes were veiled, the lines of his face became rigid. His lips moved no

more. Possidius, the faithful disciple, bent over him. Like a patriarch of

the Scriptures, Augustin of Thagaste "slept with his fathers."...

\* \* \* \* \*

And now, whatever may be the worth of this book, which has been planned

and carried out in a spirit of veneration and love for the saint, for the

great heart and the great intellect that Augustin was, for this unique type

of the Christian, the most perfect and the most admirable perhaps that

has ever been seen--the author can only repeat in all humility what was

said fifteen hundred years ago by the Bishop of Guelma, Augustin's first

biographer:

"I do desire of the charity of those into whose hands this work shall fall,

to join with me in thanksgiving and blessing to Our Lord, Who has inspired

me to make known this life to those present and those absent, and has given

me the strength to do it. Pray for me and with me, that I may try here

below to follow in the steps of this peerless man, whom, by God's goodness,

I have had the happiness of living with for such a long time...."

THE END

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of Saint Augustin, by Louis Bertrand

\*\*\* END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAINT AUGUSTIN \*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\* This file should be named 9069-8.txt or 9069-8.zip \*\*\*\*\*

This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:

http://www.gutenberg.org/9/0/6/9069/

Produced by Charles Aldorondo, Tiffany Vergon, William

Flis, and Distributed Proofreaders

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions will

be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright

law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works,

so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United

States without permission and without paying copyright

royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part

of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project

Gutenberg-tm electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm

concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark,

and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive

specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this

eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook

for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports,

performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given

away--you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks

not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the

trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free

distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work

(or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project

Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full

Project Gutenberg-tm License available with this file or online at

www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project

Gutenberg-tm electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm

electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to

and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property

(trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all

the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or

destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your

possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a

Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound

by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the

person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph

1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be

used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who

agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few

things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See

paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project

Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this

agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm

electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the

Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection

of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual

works in the collection are in the public domain in the United

States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the

United States and you are located in the United States, we do not

claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing,

displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as

all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope

that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting

free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm

works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the

Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily

comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the

same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when

you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern

what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are

in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States,

check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this

agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing,

distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any

other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no

representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any

country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other

immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear

prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work

on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the

phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed,

performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and

most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no

restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it

under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this

eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the

United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you

are located before using this ebook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is

derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not

contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the

copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in

the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are

redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project

Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply

either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or

obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm

trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted

with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution

must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any

additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms

will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works

posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the

beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm

License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this

work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this

electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without

prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with

active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project

Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary,

compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including

any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access

to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format

other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official

version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site

(www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense

to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means

of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain

Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the

full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying,

performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works

unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing

access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

provided that

\* You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from

the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method

you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed

to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has

agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid

within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are

legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty

payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in

Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg

Literary Archive Foundation."

\* You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies

you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he

does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm

License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all

copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue

all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm

works.

\* You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of

any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the

electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of

receipt of the work.

\* You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free

distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project

Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than

are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing

from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and The

Project Gutenberg Trademark LLC, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm

trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable

effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread

works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project

Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm

electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may

contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate

or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other

intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or

other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or

cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right

of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project

Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project

Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all

liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal

fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT

LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE

PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE

TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE

LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR

INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH

DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a

defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can

receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a

written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you

received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium

with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you

with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in

lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person

or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second

opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If

the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing

without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth

in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO

OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT

LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied

warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of

damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement

violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the

agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or

limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or

unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the

remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the

trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone

providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in

accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the

production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm

electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses,

including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of

the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this

or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or

additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any

Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of

electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of

computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It

exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations

from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the

assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's

goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will

remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure

and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future

generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see

Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at

www.gutenberg.org Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg

Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit

501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the

state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal

Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification

number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by

U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is in Fairbanks, Alaska, with the

mailing address: PO Box 750175, Fairbanks, AK 99775, but its

volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous

locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt

Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to

date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and

official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby

Chief Executive and Director

gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg

Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide

spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of

increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be

freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest

array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations

($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt

status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating

charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United

States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a

considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up

with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations

where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND

DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular

state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we

have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition

against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who

approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make

any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from

outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation

methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other

ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To

donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project

Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be

freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and

distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of

volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed

editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in

the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not

necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper

edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search

facility: www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm,

including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to

subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.