

NOTE

Obscured Text

Book Page 166:

May our tears and prayers move Thee

Book Page 167:

than betray his trust, exposed himself to danger – in-

licitudes and watchings, lived in prayer, and I, though cold as yet with regard to the heat of Thy Spirit, was stirred up, nevertheless, by the concern and trouble of

THE
HISTORY OF ST. MONICA.

BY
M. L ABBÉ BOUGAUD,
VICAR-GENERAL OF ORLEANS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY
REV. ANTHONY FARLEY,
ST. MONICA'S CHURCH, JAMAICA, L. I.

"Read St. Monica's Life. You will see her care for her Augustine, and find much to console you."

From a letter of St. Francis de Sales to St. Jane Frances de Chantal.

NEW YORK:
D. & J. SADLIER & COMPANY.
33 BARCLAY STREET AND 38 PARK PLACE.

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EDWARD O. JENKINS' SONS,
Printers and Electrotypers,
20 North William St., New York.

TO THE
CHRISTIAN MOTHERS OF AMERICA,

IN

DEEP APPRECIATION OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, THEIR
ANXIETIES, AND THEIR TRIALS;

AND

WITH THE EARNEST HOPE THAT THEY MAY DERIVE CONSOLA-
TION AND GUIDANCE FROM ITS PAGES,

THIS

Book is Dedicated

BY

THE TRANSLATOR.

P R E F A C E
TO THE
A M E R I C A N E D I T I O N .

DESPITE the deep love and devotion which St. Monica inspired in so many hearts, her life remained unwritten until our own day. Although so many centuries have waxed and waned since she lived out her beautiful life on that now silent and desolate African shore, between which and Europe's busy life, stretches a tideless sea; no biography of her has appeared in their course. The reason of this was probably the difficulty of obtaining a sufficient number of facts concerning her; and also because the salient points of her life were always touched upon in the Life of St. Augustine in a manner calculated to satisfy the sterner piety and less inquiring minds of the Middle Ages.

But the nineteenth century, which has brought so many desirable things, has brought St. Monica's biographer in the person of the Abbé Bougaud, and it is much to say that this Reverend gentleman's book which we have translated, however imperfectly, is worthy of its subject. He has succeeded in keeping clear and distinct to the mental gaze the personality of Monica,—not an

easy matter in the case of this great mother of a greater son—and created an interest in her distinct from that which she inspires as the mother of Augustine. We feel that even if the latter were not the illustrious doctor, and great saint of God that he is, we would still enter with the same sympathy, into the trials, and the sorrows, and the joys of Monica; pass with her from her happy, pious girlhood into that darksome valley of a wife's and mother's sorrow, and watch her attain from thence by the path of Christian heroism, to the sunny uplands of the pure love of God.

Yes, the conditions in which St. Monica attained to sanctification are those of the major portion of humanity; and this is why so strong a human interest has always attached itself to her. In the Middle Ages, because, as the Abbé Bougaud observes, she had produced the greatest doctor of the Church; and in later times, because she was the mother of a wayward son.

As the tide of infidelity, and sin in all its various forms, rises to its flood, in these our evil days, she shines above it like a star "in the clear blue night of faith."

May her influence become as potent in this new world as in the old! When she lived, and suffered, and prayed in far Thagaste, our land was the home of those mysterious races which have so utterly vanished. Since then the cross has been planted on its soil, and the Church has grown strong and flourishing. But never

was the need of St. Monica's help greater than now
That this book may make this patroness of Christian
parents, this loving consoler of sorrowing mothers,
loved wherever she has not been known, and known
better where she has been loved, is the earnest wish of

THE TRANSLATOR.

JAMAICA,
Long Island, *April 28, 1885.*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

WE were the first to conceive the project of writing the history of Saint Monica, and we must confess that the first announcement of our intention, excited surprise, and no little anxiety amongst even our intimate friends. Where was the material to be found for such a work? What interest would it arouse?

As to the material, for more than a year we had directed our studies to the end of amassing it; and this with an ever deepening interest in our subject, for what drama could be more interesting than the drama of a son saved by the tears of his mother, and becoming through this vivifying dew a great genius and a great saint? We resolved, therefore, to proceed, relying on God's blessing, and if temerity there were in our work, on the hearts of mothers to absolve us. Nor have we had reason to repent of our resolve. The first edition of this work, which contained a considerable number of copies, was exhausted in a few weeks, and notwithstanding our most earnest efforts, it has been impossible to satisfy sooner the eagerness of the public, who have been for several weeks demanding a second.

But what even more than the signally kind reception it has met with, appears to us to be the sign of God's benediction upon our work, is the feeling which it has

awakened. Since its publication, not a single day has passed without bringing us letters, the greater part of them bearing signatures unknown to us, expressive of the sadness and the hope of mothers. For six months we have listened to the beatings of their hearts and the cries of their souls, and read expressions of gratitude whose depth and earnestness have astonished us.

The Introduction had hardly appeared when a lady who has experienced many misfortunes, but attained through her trials to a high degree of virtue, begged permission to print one hundred thousand copies of the *Introduction*, in order to procure for a throng of mothers the consolation she had herself derived from its pages.

On the same day we received from the father of a family, one of those faithful, earnest men, of whom there are so few in modern society, the following letter, which its too favorable language compels us to abridge: "A cry went up from every heart upon reading your preface to the 'Life of St. Monica.' Such words as it contains can not fail to console the sorrowing, and effect the resurrection of hope in broken hearts. Every mother feels their influence to the very depths of her being, and the eyes of every father are filled with tears. Yes, reverend sir, I feel that I am but giving expression to the sentiments of every parent, when I confess that you have subjugated us. Your emotion has conquered us. The truth and eloquence of your words, the earnestness of the convictions to which you give so impassioned expression, have made themselves felt within the inmost recesses of our souls, compel us to enter in the way marked by the austere but certain joys of faith, and arouse the dormant energy of our will, by

their appeal to the noblest and purest human affection which the heart of man can know. Thanks, reverend sir, for this priceless service, and if the gratitude of a father has any value in your estimation, deign to accept the overflowing measure of," etc., etc., etc.

Now listen to a mother's language: "If I were to reflect on the presumption which leads me to write to you, I would not take up my pen; but I yield to the impulse of a soul overwhelmed by grief, which dares not permit hope to enter it. I have just read your book, and I have bathed with my tears the page whereon you say a mother can save her son if she determines to do so. But I am only a poor sinner. Can I do so in spite of this fact? I ought to be a saint, having been married to a good man, whom God tried in a thousand ways, who suffered betrayal, calumny, and ruin, with whom I have lived in sorrow for fourteen years, and who, last year, ended his earthly career, the victim of fiery trials. He has left me with one son, but, alas! it is he who was the most bitter source of my poor husband's grief. Pray for this unfortunate youth, that he may have the courage to abandon the life he leads, for which he has sacrificed all—his father, his mother, his name, and his fortune. Entreat that he may at least save his soul. Oh! sir, St. Monica must indeed love you; pray to her for a mother who is dying with grief from thinking of the salvation of her son," etc., etc., etc.

I have before me more than fifty letters bedewed by the same tears, and prompted by the same feelings. I select from them the following, written in an entirely different tone, but which nevertheless has touched my very heart.

It is from a lady who bears a name of no little re-

noun in the world. Hers is a great soul, which once fell, but once more arose, and greater than before,—transfigured by repentance and the terrific sacrifice which the love of God had extorted from her. After some words in relation to the book as a whole, she adds: “Shall I now describe to you my emotion on perusing the pages which afford us a brief glimpse of ‘the unhappy young girl who forgot God for Augustine, as Augustine forgot God for her’? To my sight this veiled figure stands unveiled. It is my soul which struggles for fifteen years, which finally escapes to find repose in God alone; which passes the remnant of life in praying, purifying herself, and loving.

“History says nothing of the grace which was strong enough to draw her from the side of Augustine, and from Adeodatus; my grateful soul can supply this deficiency. History is silent likewise as to the fact that she gave herself to God in order that her son might do the same; that she might be able to surround him with an atmosphere of prayer, so that, if ever he were to learn his mother’s miserable story or fall himself, he would know how to rise again, and that while loving him tenderly, she had never ceased to deplore the misfortune of his birth.

“This, too, I can relate. My wound heals but slowly, but I trust to live out my life, whether with a healed or bleeding soul, in the love of God. Pray for me, and ask for the perfect realization of our Lord’s designs in regard to this ruin. I await their perfecting in unceasing tears and prayer, but in peace.” She closes with an allusion to a passage in the book: “God in heaven, and those that I have loved, offered to God, and ransomed by my tears! This almost satisfies me. For

what more is required, even to enter heaven, than repentance, into which love enters far more largely than fear."

Here is an entirely different letter. It is from a young girl, one of those angels of piety, purity, and modesty, who, in the midst of a numerous family, with small means, sometimes devote themselves to aiding their mother; or, if she be removed by death, to replacing her; and who, while still young, at eighteen or twenty years of age, experience in their virgin hearts all the anguish of maternity.

"A few days ago," she writes, "I read your Preface in the '*Annales d'Orléans*,' and for a while I felt quite sad in contemplating this double life of a mother, from which I seem to be shut out. I made my plaint to our Lord, who accorded me in return a fuller comprehension of your words, and I was already completely consoled, when the perusal of a note, which you have affixed to the preface, filled me with joy.* Oh! I also have Augustines and very little Augustines. The good God has proportioned them to their Monica; and I have realized more clearly than ever, in reading your words, that it is necessary for me to devote myself utterly to them. My weakness, my discouragement, my want of faith in their regard overwhelm me with regret. If I had relied more fully on God, if there had been more of hope in the tears which I have already shed for them, perhaps they would have been saints to-day. And then there are so many souls besides theirs to occupy me, I look around and perceive so many, and I would that the Church possessed their love!"

* Relative to Eugenie de Guerin.

Here we realize that sweet communion of soul with soul upon which Pere Lacordaire dwelt in such elevated language at the beginning of his illustrious apostolate. "Communion of souls," he writes, "began to reveal itself to me,—a communion which constitutes the true felicity of the priest who is worthy of his mission, and which removes all regret at having relinquished for Jesus Christ the ties, friendships, and hopes of this world. I beheld the birth of affection and gratitude which drew their being from no natural source, and which attached man to the priest by ties whose sweetness was as divine as their strength. When a man has once tasted these joys which are a foretaste of those in the life to come, all else vanishes, and pride passes through the mind only as an impure breath whose bitter taste is unmistakable."

I had already experienced this sweet communion of souls at the time of the publication of the "Life of St. Chantal." "St. Monica" reveals it to me to-day in a more profound and moving manner.

It must be supposed, however, that a book of this kind always finds its way into such devout hands. Sometimes it reaches regions essentially worldly, and evokes from thence tones full of a charm peculiar to themselves. "I must confess, Reverend Sir," writes another, "that I have never held the life of a saint to be interesting reading, and if your volume had not been sent to me by my son, who won it in a lottery, I should most certainly never have procured it. I return thanks to heaven for my son's good fortune, and the impulse which led him to present the book to me. He did not foresee that it was going to prove to me a new and signal manifestation of God's nearness to the soul who

seeks Him. For, sir, it is St. Augustine especially who has done me good; for there exists, alas! much more analogy between his troubled, darkened soul, and mine, than between my misery and the incomparable virtue of St. Monica. Will you permit me to say frankly what I think of your work? I fear that the model which you offer to mothers is so perfect that none among them will have courage to imitate it. We are so weak! Our love of God is so feeble! And though we love our children passionately, we love them so little for God!

“I thought that I loved my son as a Christian mother, at least since I received some time ago the grace to become more serious, and managed to surmount all obstacles and place him in a Christian school. I thought, I repeat, when I had done this, that I had done all that was required of me, but how have I been undeceived by the model which you have placed before me! But who, in our day, can attain to such heights! I am almost discouraged. I ask myself whether God exacts such heroic love from all mothers, and if He does, how we can attain it? To love children with a love that would rather see them perish than commit a sin! Sometimes I declare to God in my prayers that I cherish such a desire. But is it with perfect sincerity? I sometimes fear to say it, lest I blaspheme through love.”

Oh, never! You do not blaspheme through love, mother, who begin to perceive the summits of divine affection, though you hesitate to mount thither. Take courage! The hour is not far distant which shall see you a true mother.

What shall I add to all the letters I have just cited?

It is the happiness of a book like this that it addresses it self to the best and noblest sentiments of the soul, that it penetrates into regions completely separated from us, and excites there emotion full of hope. Among my letters there is one from England, written by a protestant minister, one of those souls in search of the truth, of which there are so many in that noble and religious country.

He writes : " I have read with pleasure your beautiful book on St. Monica. Allow me to thank you for it. It appears to gain so much more actuality from the fact that our age is comparable to the agitated Augustine. Oh, may the divine voice resound victoriously in its ears ! *Take up and read*, and may the Scriptures then lead it back to the Church of that afflicted mother, whose mission is to persevere in prayer and tears. For, dear sir, do you not think like myself, that the day is not far off, when, according to the prophecy of Malachi, the hearts of the fathers and hearts of the children shall be drawn nearer to each other ? Seven hundred millions of human beings await our reconciliation to embrace the Gospel. Let us endeavor, as did St. Monica, to hasten their deliverance by prayers, sighs and holy labors. The evening of the day on which I finished the reading of your book, I showed it in a protestant drawing-room, to a lady of very high position in the world, and a great admirer of Mme. de Chantal, from your life of whom she has transcribed many passages for her own edification. When reflecting on the evils of the age, our hearts were deeply touched. It is needful that we experience for it the anguish of his mother's heart for Augustine."

Weariness would never make me put aside these letters in which parental love finds so true, so profound,

and so strong an expression, and which constitutes to-day our supreme hope, and reveals the fact that while parents' sorrows are great, their resources are equally so. Let us cite one more example: "Will you allow a simple woman, a poor Vertdean mother who has been deeply moved on reading your 'Life of St. Monica,' to present to you in the name of all Christian mothers, her heart-felt thanks? No one will read your book, I am certain of it, without being lifted above the things of earth, moved to the very depths of her heart, and fired with enthusiasm at the greatness of her vocation and her sublime duties. Yes, sir, you are right. If it be necessary to be ready to die to save the temporal life of her child, with far more reason ought a mother suffer death in order to save his soul. And once this resolve is taken in the souls of mothers, I believe, I am sure, that they will succeed. I started upon reading in your book that passage where you picture the mother of the Maccabees, the mother of St. Symphorian, and many others, animating their youthful sons to suffer death rather than offend God. But, sir, why have you cited only mothers of antiquity? Do you think those of to-day incapable of such heroism? Have you no modern instances to quote?"

And then this mother, urged by a noble jealousy, relates to me an example of two or three mothers whose conduct during the horrors of the Revolution, equalled all that is most sublime in the history of the mother of the Maccabees. Madame de la Roche St. André for example, who, condemned to death along with her three daughters, demanded and obtained from the executioner, that her three daughters might mount the scaffold before her, "in order," she said, "that I may

see all that I love in safety." Also Madame Saillous de Saumur, who, when led to the scaffold with her young daughter aged eighteen years, and of rare beauty, remarking with uneasiness, the attention paid the latter by an officer who was well known to be a *roué*, and the perceptible hesitation of her child, who, by following him, could save her life, offered the executioner a recompense to permit her child to die first. He did so, and when her own turn came, she loosened her tresses and drew forth some pieces of gold, gave them to the executioner, and died happy in the thought of having saved her child's virtue.

Such is the letter of the Vendean mother; and to the noble examples of heroism which she relates therein, she might have added the instance of the Irishwoman, cited by O'Connell. Her son, being pressed to take a vote detrimental to the liberty of his country, hesitated, for he knew that his refusal would probably condemn his aged mother, his wife, and young children to beggary. The prospect was too terrible. He yielded, and went forward to deposit his false vote in the urn, when his aged mother suddenly appeared beside him, and, seizing him by the arm, cried out, "Remember your soul and the freedom of your country."

I wept while reading the above letter and said to myself: "Yes, the present age is indeed one of unrest, but the souls of mothers are inspired with such sublime thoughts, that we may continue to hope. Yes, an age of Augustines shall be ransomed by an age of Monicas."

It is to aid this movement that I have written this book. I thank God for its having awakened an echo in many a soul; and I bless the mothers who have read my thoughts with their hearts, and, by the intuition

of love have been enabled to find in this book far more than my poor talent was able to infuse into it.

Too well do I realize that my book is far from equal to the greatness and beauty of its subject. Alas, it does not even come up to my own ideal! But among the criticisms to which it is undoubtedly open, there is one whose justice I shall never be brought to admit. It is that of having dwelt too much upon St. Augustine. "All that can be said," wrote one of our greatest orators to me, "will never alter the fact that the history of St. Monica can never be anything save the history of her son. And this is precisely what makes it so grand and beautiful, and constitutes the originality and peculiar charm of your book." And a mother likewise says: "Those who are led to complain that in the history of St. Monica, St. Augustine is accorded the first place, knows not what it is to be a mother. It constitutes the happiness of mothers to put their children in the first place, and conceal themselves behind them. But though concealed, they still continue to support them. She lives in them, and for my part I can not conceive of the history of a mother which would not be the history of her children."

Therefore, instead of having lessened, in the new edition of my work, the place accorded to St. Augustine in the former, I have enlarged it; and this in accordance with the advice given me in a letter whose kindness was far beyond my merits, and written by one of the greatest champions which the Church has known in this century.* After having expressed his friendly apprehensions, on hearing the history of St. Monica an

* Auguste Nicolas.

nounced, he goes on to say: "Thanks be to God who has blessed your disinterestedness and the piety of your zeal, these fears have given place to the liveliest satisfaction. In truth, the 'History of St. Monica' is written as well, and even more graphically, than the 'Life of St. Chantal.' There is more vigor, though no less refinement in the style. You have been equally fortunate in overcoming the difficulties attending your work, for you have gained in depth and elevation what it did not afford in either variety or extent. Neither in outline nor in detail so rich as 'St. Chantal,' neither depicting an epoch nor a great religious movement, it does less, and at the same time more, than did your preceding work. In 'St. Monica' one figure relieves the other, as in the picture by Ary Scheffer. But the figures are a son and a mother, and it is because of this that you have been able to attain to so perfect a knowledge of Christian humanity. The very simplicity and attenuation of your subject will serve to make St. Monica a winged arrow, of which St. Augustine shall be the quiver." And after these very kind words he adds: "May I suggest to you that a chapter portraying briefly the development of Augustine's genius and sanctity after the death of his mother, would have probably served as a golden background from which she would have stood forth in still higher relief?"

Accepting the suggestion of so great a master, I have endeavored to write the chapter suggested, but to make it "a golden background" would have required the pen of the eloquent apologist who originated the idea.

This is the only addition that I have made to this second edition of my work, and if I except some 12-

touches on difficult passages, and the introduction of some niceties of sentiment or of taste suggested in kindness and accepted with gratitude, constitutes the only difference which exists between the first and second editions.

So let it go forth to perform its mission, this book which God has deigned to bless! Let it commence anew to console and strengthen mothers! Let it teach them to become great by remaining devoted, to be the saviors of the age, and work out their own salvation, by loving the souls of their children. A Protestant historian said of the France of early centuries that it was a kingdom formed by bishops. Alas! neither bishops nor priests can remake modern France if Christian mothers come not to their aid! God has confided to mothers the cradle of man—that is to say, almost everything.

MEURSAULT, July 29, 1866.

INTRODUCTION.

A HISTORY, such as the one I undertake to relate, should not be written, but sung! For it is a poem, a poem of the most beautiful love that perhaps ever existed; a love the most profound and most tender, the most noble and most pure; also the strongest, most patient, and most indomitable; a love that during twenty-five years of tears and trials, never for an instant wearies, but rather strengthens with trial, becoming more ardent and more persistent as its obstacles increase; a love which, triumphing at last (for who could resist such love?) ends happily in a species of transport and ecstasy.

Have you ever seen Ary Scheffer's beautiful picture, representing St. Monica and St. Augustine seated on the sea-shore? St. Augustine is in the foreground, a young man about thirty years of age. His face is pale, refined, still slightly sad in expression, as that of a person just recovering from a serious illness; his eyes are dark and deep, a little lacking perhaps in softness and tenderness, but suffused with the most beautiful light; the pensive lips are closed, as those of one accustomed to mental labor. The hair is short, cut close to the head, and revealing a broad forehead, on which falls a ray of light, emblem of this powerful mind. The elbow of the right arm is resting on the knee, and

the forearm seems lifting itself to support a wearied head; but the head no longer needs support; it is erect, slightly thrown back, in order that it may gaze heavenwards. With his left hand Augustine presses his mother's hands, as though saying that if after so many errors, deceptions, and struggles, he can now raise a purified and happy look towards God, it is to his mother that he owes it all.

And this mother, how radiant is she by his side! She is in full light, whilst Augustine is still a little in shade, as befits a penitent; she is a head taller than her son, to denote that she has preceded him, and, until now, has soared higher in the paths of virtue and of love. Beneath the radiant joy suffusing her countenance, I should have liked to discern the trace of her past tears; but how beautiful are her eyes, as indeed all eyes are that gaze heavenwards; these half-open lids tell the tenderness of the loving soul, and express the pure, calm, grateful joy of a mother who has found her son! Clad in white, and enveloped in long veils, which lie like folded wings, she appears but awaiting the signal for flight, and in her present state, having led back to God her Augustine, who is now a Christian, a penitent, and on the road to sanctity, she would indeed fly away did she not clasp her son's hand in hers; this it is that retains her still; but in closely looking at these hands, more clasped than clasping, and about to re-open, we feel that this final embrace will not retain her long.

It is of this mother that I write. I would relate her story for the consolation of so many Christian mothers who weep to-day as they wept of old; to warn the younger among them who are a prey to vague disquietudes, to reveal to all how divine is the strength with

which God has endowed them in the interest of their children's eternal salvation; how unexpected and un-failing are the resources concealed by Him in that wonderful thing we term paternity and maternity.

Leibnitz said: "We should reform the world if we reformed education"; and I say, we should reform education, children, youths, and men, and extricate the present age from the redoubtable religious crisis it is traversing, could we but transform mothers. And what is required to effect this? A very simple, but rare thing, wanting in nearly every mother, even in the best. I mean the consciousness of their God-given strength, and the courage to exercise it to the very utmost when the soul of their child is concerned.

Generally but very few individuals tax their powers to the utmost. For example, what thinker does so as regards his reasoning faculties? What orator is able to draw from his soul her every word? What public or private individual, what Christian, who knows how to apply his whole being to any work, whether temporal or spiritual? To tax one's spiritual or mental powers to the utmost demands a painful effort, from which almost every one recoils; hence the rarity of heroes and saints. On the other hand, the misery and alarming danger of the present day is, that there are scarcely any mothers now who exercise to the utmost the divine powers attached to maternity.

I made this remark one day to a Christian mother, who was disquieted about her young son's future, and who confided to me her anxieties. I replied: "Why fear? Your son will be what you make him: good, pure, noble, generous, brave, fearing nought but God, if you possess these virtues, and know how to plant

them in his soul so deep that no power shall be able to uproot them." "You believe so?" she asked me. "But think of the passions of the human heart, the pestilential atmosphere of the age, the many dangers which a mother can neither foresee nor ward off." "Dangers a mother can not foresee; yes, doubtless such there are," said I; "but dangers that she can not ward off, there are none such, if she knows how to use the strength which God has given her. Even should her child succumb to evil for a moment, if the mother but will so, he will arise from the abyss, and return to virtue's path." "If the mother wills it?" "Yes, only will it." "And if I will so with all the powers of my soul, I shall save my child?" "Yes, certainly." "Ah, well, I will it," she replied, in a tone that I shall never forget. Noble and Christian mother! she has willed it, and wills it still; and though the work be not yet completed, and the child, as a feeble bark, is exposed to the storms of early life, all augurs that the will of his mother will be stronger than the winds and the waves. Such is the doctrine of the book which I now offer to the Christian public.

But before bringing forward a memorable example in support of this doctrine, I crave permission to dwell on it a little; for this doctrine, so simple, so elementary, and apart from which maternity is but a heavy burden inasmuch as it is only a powerless ministry; this idea, formerly so popular, and which caused so many a noble heart to beat with sublime enthusiasm, is one of those most ignored at the present day; and I avow that I can neither comprehend why this should be so, nor console myself for the fact.

Look at the earthly life, and behold how God has

arranged so that in this respect even paternity and maternity should possess a species of omnipotence. The child is the offspring of a pre-existing affection, and one which excels all others in tenderness, depth, and sweetness. Long before making his appearance in this world, he lives in his father's thoughts, in his mother's blissful dreams, and when at last he takes his place at their hearth, he is neither a stranger nor unknown. He is the very substance of his parents; their blood flows in his veins; he bears their double likeness, so that in gazing at him his father traces on his lips and in his smile something of the charm of her who gave him birth; and the mother, in her turn contemplating the child, also perceives in his eyes and brow something of the intelligence and nobleness of him whose son he is.* And, as if these all-powerful ties were inefficient to assure efficacious protection, at the moment when the child issues, so to speak, from his parents' hearts, God inflames them with a love, nobleness, tenderness, unselfishness, and devotion, truly admirable; and since nothing would be more sad than such a love, if powerless, He adds a strength not of this world. This young man, so volatile, thoughtless, and ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, whence comes it that he is so changed? He is a father. This young girl, "yesterday she required delicate food, costly apparel, and a soft couch: the faintest breath of air incommoded her; to-day, coarse bread, a rough garment, and a handful of straw

*Who does not remember the admirable words addressed to St. John Chrysostom by his mother, and related by him in the first book of his work on the Priesthood? "My son, I could not turn my eyes from you, for you seemed to me the living image of my dear departed husband." (*De Sacerd.*, lib. 1, n. 5.)

suffice her, so long as her breast affords one drop of milk to nourish her babe, and her ragged mantle one corner wherein to wrap him." * Yesterday the slightest look alarmed her; where are the armies, thunderbolts, or perils that can blanch her cheek to-day? It is told of one who, on hearing that her son had been borne away by savages, threw herself into their midst, and by the majesty of her grief, and the august cry of her love, compelled them to retreat. Who but has heard of that other mother, who, seeing her child carried off by a lion, followed him in her distraction, and by her very grief moved the savage beast to pity?

This strength and love are so profound, so evidently do they proceed from the very Heart of God, and from the bowels of His infinite goodness, that we may without exaggeration say that a parent's heart is the most beautiful work of His hands. All else may perish, but so long as there remains in the world one mother's heart, there will be an irrefutable proof of divine goodness; for if weak woman can do so much for her children, what will not God do for His? What miracles of generosity and power will there not issue from this ocean of boundless mercy, if but one drop of this love, placed by God in a weak human heart, can work such mighty wonders?

Therefore the Church, distrustful of all terrestrial affection, because she knows its weakness, says even to the child of the best mother: "My son, love thy mother, and forget not the womb of her that bore thee." She says to the young man and to the maiden, at the very moment that they, enraptured, approach the altar

* Chateaubriand, "Génie du Christianisme."

to vow an eternal love: "Children, ever love one another." The Church, who, as those old in years do, scarcely believes in the eternity of vows or the duration of earthly friendships, experiences no shadow of fear or disquietude for the most lowly mother; she counts on that maternal heart, for that love is the sole earthly love that she does not distrust. And God Himself, when He wishes to arouse our confidence, and make us comprehend the magnitude of His love for us, and consequently the certainty of His omnipotent aid, seeks no other type than maternal love: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee."*

Behold the father and mother, such as God created them; behold the incomparable love, the indomitable strength, beneath whose shadow the children grow up in peace.

These miracles, has God wrought them but for this miserable, terrestrial life? Is it but for the transient, fleeting things of time, for a life soon to be quenched in the grave, that God has made paternity so grand and noble a thing? Has He done nought for the soul? When the divine life He has implanted within, of which so many a foe strives to rob us, is at stake, can it be possible that He has left maternity an unarmed, defenceless spectator of dangers she can not avert, of ruins she can never repair? Ah, let us not thus blaspheme the divine work. As regards the life of the body, a mother can do much; with regard to the soul she can do all; and the world would be saved could we succeed in convincing mothers of this truth.

* Isaias xlix. 15.

The Count de Maistre wrote as follows to his lively and witty daughter Constance, who complained of the rôle assigned to woman in society, and desired that they should take up the pen and become authoresses: "My dear child, how you deceive yourself respecting woman's real power and mission. Neither the 'Iliad,' 'Æneid,' 'Jerusalem Delivered,' 'Phœdrus,' 'Athalia,' nor the 'Treatise on Universal History,' nor 'Telemachus,' were written by her; but she performs greater things, for on her knees is fashioned the world's most precious treasure." Foremost among the divine powers attached by God to motherhood is that, not merely of forming the child's body, but the more signal one of moulding his soul.

Undoubtedly, if the father be wanting in elevation of character, and the mother be engrossed with trifles, they will imprint the same character on their child; but, given a true mother, one of those noble and faithful souls who would rather die than belie their God or their conscience, in accordance with the spirited motto of our fathers: *Potius mori quam fœdari*; and picture to yourself the influence to which her child's soul will be subjected during the nine months that he slumbers within a womb sanctified by such an affection; and during the two or three years in which, whilst tending his cradle, she awakes him to honor and to virtue; and during life's sweet spring, when the child believes in his mother, and, so to say, in none but her; also, later on, during the perilous season of youth, when, though the world deceives us, we still listen to the truth from the lips of a Christian mother; and so on through the whole of life; for so long as one's mother lives, there radiates from her heart, as from a gentle luminary, a

light-giving, warming, vivifying influence. The character imprinted by such a mother on the soul of her offspring will be indelible and proof against all the assaults of the enemy. The child will either unswervingly tread the paths of truth and virtue, or, should he for one moment deviate therefrom, he will at least preserve some vestiges of the sacred fire, some sparks of probity and honor, and in the midst of surrounding evil will experience a sadness and disquietude that clearly prove he was made for something better; a thousand divine stigmata revealing to the most careless observer that a Christian mother has been there; like those beautiful marble antiques mutilated by the Vandals, which, amid their degradation and their ruins, retain the stamp of the great master who chiselled them.

Would that I had time to unroll here the annals of Christian paternity and maternity; I should then bring forward, in order to fire the hearts of my readers with a noble enthusiasm, the two generations of great souls: those who never swerve from the path of light and virtue, and those, alas! who only attain it, as M. de Maistre says, by an *ellipse*, which brings them back to the spot whence they started;* and in both the one and the other you would see how profound is this divine character when imprinted on the soul by a true mother. Who moulded St. Bernard? Who made him so pure, so strong, and so inflamed with divine love? His father, Texelin; his saintly mother, Aleth. And St. Chantal? Ah! she was motherless; but she had, shall I say, a father, a mother, or both at once, in that incomparable magistrate, President Frémyot. And St

* De Maistre, "Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg," tom. I., p. 87

Symphorian, to whom did she owe her heroic life and death, save to her intrepid mother, Augusta?

How utter the name of Origen, that great yet tender genius, without beholding his venerable father, Leonides, bending over his cradle, and reverently kissing his child, as the temple of the Holy Ghost? And St. John Chrysostom, whose noble thoughts and magnanimous resolves were due to his courageous and sublime mother? And St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, and St. Gregory the Great; and later on, St. Louis, St. Edward, St. Francis of Assisi; and in modern times, St. Francis of Sales and St. Theresa? One need cite all the heroes and all the saints, for there is scarcely one to whom God did not give, in a father or mother worthy of him, a precursor fitted to prepare him for his lofty destiny. And if the shades of history do not always allow us to discern the venerable hands that have moulded his soul, I do not hesitate to affirm their existence; just as when I see a statue by Michael Angelo, or a picture by Raphael, it matters little whether they bear the artist's signature or no. I look at them, and through the obscurity that veils their origin, and which at most conceals but a mere name, I hail the genius which has conceived them, and which alone could have given them birth.

It was said long ago by a writer, brilliant and profound, in spite of his apparent levity: "*Fortes creantur fortibus et bonis.*"—The strong spring from the strong; the good are created by the good.* And holy Scripture irradiating this beautiful thought with heavenly light, expresses it still better: "*Generatio rectorum*

* Horace.

benedicetur.”—The generation of the righteous is blessed. To the honor of Christian mothers this will be always true.

As for those souls, so beautiful also, who, ere refinding the path of light, remain an instant in darkness, but who are sad, uneasy, and restless, because they have wandered from the truth, and from their mother's teaching; to them I present in this volume such an example that I deem it useless to cite any other. In it we shall see how this divine character is imprinted on the child's soul, and how impossible it is even for the most violent passions ever to efface it when it has been imprinted by a true mother.

But, O mothers! to influence thus deeply the soul of your child, how great must be your sufferings! The pangs of childbirth are nothing in comparison, and this is just, inasmuch as that which you have to fashion is the grandest thing the world contains. An author, on completing his book, said: “I have just concluded my task, which has been written during the silence of seventeen nights. Still shuddering at the suffering it has cost me, I gaze at it with anxiety, and wonder whether the world will heed my words.” O mothers! can you say as much? Do you shudder at the recollection of the sufferings you endured in forming your child's soul? Will the world be able to say of you what St. Augustine said of the admirable mother whose life I now lay before you: “She suffered more in begetting me to truth and virtue than she suffered in giving me birth”? This is the first lesson contained in my book, and I feel persuaded that in the sad times in which we live it will neither be inopportune nor devoid of interest.

It contains a second lesson, likewise very important, and the necessary consequence of the first one. Of what avail for God to endow mothers with power to imprint a sacred character on their children's souls, if at the dawn of passion He did not invest them with a second power, omnipotent and infallible also,—the power of efficaciously protecting their children, and snatching them, if they will, from every peril? Is not this the reason why God has made this admirable law, that when the young man ascends the scorching summits of the hill of life, the father descends the same; that when the young girl is about to taste of life's enchanted cup, which at sixteen seems synonymous with happiness, the mother has quaffed it even to the dregs, and has learnt the hollowness of the world's vanities and illusions, at the very hour in which her children are in danger of being dazzled by the same? Why is it so, save that they may learn from lips whose sincerity they will never question, the sole words capable of disabusing them of their illusions?

Is not this the reason, too, why God has endowed parents with a kind of intuition, enabling them to discern the real dangers which await their child, and the road whereby he may avoid the same? Is it not that the child may be directed aright on his perilous journey that God has rendered paternity so holy a thing, and that He has subjected so many fathers to those sublime contradictions which daily meet our gaze, which we can not define, and which awake both smiles and tears?

I know a magistrate, an honorable, amiable, and clever man, but who had rarely used his intellect save to rail at holy things. I went to see him a short time ago, and found him with his charming little daughter

of eleven or twelve years of age sitting on his knee, and whom he was preparing for her first communion. He was hearing her say her catechism, and as I entered he was just explaining to her the meaning of the word mystery, telling her that there were mysteries everywhere, in nature, in society, in man especially, and therefore it was not to be wondered at that there were mysteries in the Divinity; and so delighted was he at the quickness with which his little child had caught the meaning of her lesson, that he repeated to me her answers, and some of those remarks that fall so sweetly when they proceed from children's lips. On beholding this charming scene, I thought of Diderot taking his daughter to catechism at Saint Sulpice, and explaining to her each chapter; of another, who shall be nameless, for he is still living, who forbids his children ever to enter his study, lest their gaze should be sullied by the papers lying on his table. He is willing enough to corrupt the world, but he is a father, and he will not sully his daughter's mind. So true and touching contradictions, occurring continually in days such as these. Too often the *man* is frivolous, sceptical, impious, a railer at holy things; but the *father* is always holy. God has willed it thus, and that for the children's sake.

But especially at the hour of their children's danger has God placed within each parent's heart that invincible strength of which I have just cited such noble examples. Thanks to divine goodness! whatever sufferings mothers have endured to save their children's temporal life, they have done more to save their souls. They have suffered to spare them suffering; they have cast themselves into the lion's jaws; have braved hostile armies; have spent whole days, nights, and weeks

by their child's sick-bed, without food or sleep. This I have seen them do, and I have wondered more at their love than at their strength; they have laid down their lives on their children's behalf, and what more can one do for those one loves? Yet, I repeat, that they have done a thousand-fold more to save their children's souls. To die for those we love is not the highest sacrifice. We can do more than die for our loved ones; a mother's greatest martyrdom consists in giving up her children's life; in holding truth, virtue, honor, true beauty of soul, her child's eternal life, in such high esteem, that rather than see these holy things tarnished or withered, she would see her child die.

I know not who the philosopher was who, on asking himself the question, "What is man?" gave this sublime reply: "Man is a being capable of yielding up his life in the cause of justice." The Christian mother is a more wondrous being than this. She is capable of giving up her child's life in the cause of justice; who so intensely loves justice, truth,—that is to say, God's indwelling presence in her child's soul,—that rather than He should quit the sanctuary where she herself has placed Him, she would see the material tabernacle break and disappear. What say I? She is a being who, when persecution breaks out, and evil is in the ascendant, rather than see her child's eternal happiness imperilled, and thus lose him forever, hesitates not one moment to hand him over to the executioner, preferring to see him dead than sullied. Behold what a wondrous spectacle our Lord Jesus Christ has exhibited to the world in creating the Christian mother.

Scarcely had He appeared here below, than we see lowly women taking their little children on their knees,

and mingling austere lessons of faith with kisses and caresses, say: "My child, I would rather behold thee lying dead at my feet, than ever see thee commit one mortal sin."

Sublime creature! What she has said she has also done. Behold her as the mother of the holy twins of Langres, descending into the dungeon where her little children were imprisoned for the faith, and going from one to the other, with a countenance beaming with joy, exclaim: "Oh! of all my glorious ancestors, not one has conferred such splendor on my name as that which the immortal honor of your deaths is about to do."

Then again, as the mother of St. Symphorian of Autun, who, learning that her son was sentenced to be beheaded for Christ's sake, and that he was already being led to martyrdom, trembling lest in the early bloom of his sixteen years he should for one moment regret bidding adieu to life, ran to meet him, and as soon as she caught sight of him, cried: "My son, look up to heaven; they do not rob thee of thy life, they but give thee a better one in its stead."

Then again, as did St. Denise, she stands at the foot of the instrument of torture, by her looks sustaining her dear child amid the agonies of the blows inflicted; and then, when life was extinct, she carried away his little lacerated corpse, burying it with songs of Christian joy, mingled with a mother's lamentations.

And if looks and exhortations did not suffice, if supplications and tears were needed, we behold her fall at her child's knees, conjuring him to die courageously for his mother's sake; as that heroic mother of the Machabees, who, though born before our Lord's advent, was

already consumed by the fire which He was about to kindle upon earth. After she had encouraged her six eldest children to die, and with grief in her soul, but serenity on her brow, had at the death of each received that incurable wound which the loss of a child inflicts, when it was the turn of her seventh son, a child of thirteen, her Benjamin, trembling lest his courage should fail, she cast herself at his knees, and pointing to her breast, exclaimed: "My child, remember that for nine months I bore thee in my womb, and that for three years I nourished thee at my breast; for my sake fear not the executioner, but die courageously, as did thy six brethren." What a mother's agonies at such a moment as that must have been, no pen can tell, nor yet describe the sufferings of a *Symphorosa*, a *Felicia*, and many others who followed in their train. One feels that an eternity of bliss, with their children folded in their arms, is the due of such mothers as these.

Undoubtedly it is but rarely that God demands such sacrifices. But it is none the less true that she who is incapable of sacrificing her child's temporal life is no Christian mother; and that she who hesitates to sacrifice herself in order to save her child from acts of sin and cowardice, is a degenerate parent, and unworthy the noble name of mother. But when she has resolved to give up all,—time, ease, even her child's life,—rather than see him stained by sin, can it be possible that her child should perish? The storms of an evil age may bear him away; he may be driven before the tempest and drift from his moorings; but perish, never! His anchor fails not. Do you know where it is? In his mother's hands, therefore nought can sever him from it. This truth stands prominently forth in the following

touching story; and I venture to promise myself that no mother will end its perusal without learning how to hold, when the tempest is fiercest, the anchors which will save her children's frail bark from foundering. And yet, necessary as it is to remind mothers of the double power God has given them of moulding and shielding their children's soul, if this book contained no other lesson, I should perhaps never have written it. I wished to draw attention to a higher doctrine, and reveal to mothers a more important secret, too much ignored at the present day, which constitutes the august grandeur of Christian paternity, and is also its greatest aid in critical times.

Never shall I forget the emotion I experienced when I first attended the death-bed of a young man. I can even now see the father pacing the room, speechless and sad, overwhelmed by that tearless grief that is so injurious in its effects; by the death-bed sat the poor mother, whose sobs, repressed during her son's agony, at last broke forth. I was sitting at her side, my heart rent with grief, but speechless, for I knew not how to console her. I well remember that during the long silence, such as ever follows poignant sorrow, (for at such times what can one say?) I asked myself how it was that God, who is goodness itself, could permit such things, and inflict such cruel wounds on a mother's heart? I learnt the answer to my question two years later, when in the same chamber, and, alas! at the foot of the same bed, I aided that mother in her dying moments, and was startled by hearing these words, almost her last: "I am going to join my child." Light broke in upon me, and I then saw that this life is not all; and that if, in order to elevate and purify souls, and render

them rich in virtue, God sometimes severs loving hearts, it is that He may reunite them in a region where their mutual affection will be deepened, and parting will be unknown. Trembling with emotion, I closed that mother's eyes, and many a time since then, thinking of her and her son, both vanished from our gaze, both now reunited in heaven, I ask myself what trace remains of their painful wound? Scarcely a memory, and who can tell but that this memory is itself a happy one?

But allow me to say there is another death-bed, beside which I can not think that God will leave a mother powerless. Suppose that, instead of being parted from her child for a day or for years, a Christian mother beholds him on the point of being lost to her for eternity; picture to yourself a holy mother, one loving God above all else, seeing her child fall away from God, and become the object of His eternal hatred: is it possible that at the moment when the terrible separation is about to be accomplished, she can do nought to save him? I do not appeal to the sacred writings for a reply: I listen to the voice of reason, of common sense, above all to the voice of my heart, which can not be more tender than the Divine Heart, and I say with certainty: No; that is not possible; God has not left a mother powerless at such a moment. It must be that somewhere within the most divine part of her soul, in the profoundest depths of her maternal love, He has hidden something, I know not what; some deep impulse; a cry, a tear, or a sob, which, though every mother may not be able to give it utterance (as it was not every mother who could utter the cry which melted the heart of the Florentine lion), is nevertheless there, and which, if it but proceed from the soul, as it surely

will do where reigns the two-fold love of God and of her son, will infallibly save her child's soul. This is my belief.

Yes; when in order to reclaim her erring son, she has exhausted counsels, warnings, and reproofs; when there seems nought else that can be done, she has still one resource left, and that the most mighty power of all,—her tears. Let her pray and weep; within those depths where the heart of the mother and the Christian meet, let her search until she finds a certain tear, made expressly by God; and behold! her child is saved. We daily see young men who have abused all their opportunities, whose life has been one scene of ignominy and vice, returning to the paths of virtue, and that because of their mothers' tears.*

*What I say of mothers, I say, to a certain extent, of wives, daughters, and sisters, and will cite one touching instance, that I may enlist in the noble crusade of prayer all souls worthy of entering those ranks. Who has not heard of that charming brother and sister, too soon vanished from this world, Maurice and Eugénie de Guérin? Maurice, led away by the dissipations of Paris, had for an instant forgotten the God and the faith of his childhood. What did his sister do meanwhile? She trembled for him; she groaned and prayed. "Maurice," she wrote, some time after his decease, "I believe thou art in heaven. Thy own religious sentiments and the infinite mercy of God inspire me with this confidence. Must not God, so good, compassionate, loving, and paternal, have had pity for His returning son? There are three years of thy life that grieve me. Would that I could efface them with my tears! I placed all my hopes in thee, as if thou hadst been my son. I was less thy sister than thy mother. Dost thou remember that when we were speaking of my grief at thy dear soul's errors, I likened myself to Monica weeping for her Augustine? How earnestly have I entreated God for thy salvation! A saintly priest said to me: '*Your*

Holy Scripture is also in harmony with these consoling thoughts. In the days of your deepest sorrow, read the story of Agar banished from Abraham's tents, fleeing to the desert, and leading her child by the hand. Overhead is the scorching sun; her feet tread the burning sand; her child, parched with thirst, groans, and is at the point of death. She stops a moment, and looks anxiously round for help. The horizon is one blaze of fire: nowhere can she find that drop of water for which she would give her life. Then, filled with despair, seeing death approach, she lays her child down beneath a palm tree, and departs, saying: "I will not see the boy die." But soon (for she was not far off, and though she could not see him die, she wished to behold him still), when the unhappy mother hears her son's sighs growing weaker and weaker, mad with grief, she falls on her knees and utters a cry,—what cry I know not, but it reached the Heart of God,—and at the same moment a well of water sprang up at her feet, as if God intended to show us that He can not withstand the sorrow of one who entreats for her child's life. How much more surely then will He give ear when she weeps over an erring, guilty one, who is in danger of eternal death.

But it is specially in the New Testament that this consoling lesson stands forth with more marked tenderness and love. Have you observed that the Saviour's loving Heart was never deaf to the cry proceeding from a parent's heart? When the centurion, for instance, came to Him, saying, "Lord, my son is dangerously sick," what does the good Master reply? "Go, thy

brother will return. Oh yes, he did return, and then left me for heaven,—for heaven, I hope."

son is healed." Jairus and his wife throw themselves at His feet, weeping (they had lost a child of twelve years of age, that pleasing time when waning childhood and approaching youth lend so sweet a charm); our Lord, moved with compassion, leaves all, follows them, enters the house, and taking the child by the hand, restores her to her mother. It is true that He did not instantly grant the request of the Canaanitish mother; He feigned indifference, but only that a still deeper cry of faith might issue from her heart; and when that cry has gone forth, He exclaims: "O, mother, great is thy faith; go, thy daughter is healed." Who has not read the touching story of the widow of Nain? She does not go in search of our Lord, does not even see Him; but overwhelmed by grief and blinded by her tears, follows the bier of her only son. It is Jesus who beholds her who, touched by her grief, draws near, and stopping the bier, says, "Weep not, O mother," and gives her back her child. Why did our Lord multiply such miracles as these? That He might make mothers understand the august power He has entrusted to them; that He may teach them to utter that cry which He can not resist: and consequently make them resolve never to be discouraged, whatever storms assail their children's youth, but follow them with their tears, and lead them back to God by their own prayers, sufferings, and self-sacrifice.

But, so important is this lesson, so deeply must it be graven on the soul, that these examples, touching though they may be, might have proved insufficient. A still more abundant light was needed in order to enkindle in maternal hearts the fire of unquenchable hope, and for this end God resolved to give the world an example which it could never forget.

We shall therefore behold a young man, trained by the holiest of mothers, whose tender years were most lovingly, vigilantly, yet strictly guarded; one, gifted with a genius of the highest order, and a heart even superior to his intellect; consequently one whose spotless childhood should have been succeeded by the happiest and purest youth; and so it would doubtless have been had his education been confided solely to his mother. Unfortunately she was married to a madman, for what other term can be applied to a man who, as careless of his son's virtue as he was of his own, unreasonable and despotic in his wishes, appeared for fifteen years to make sport of his child's innocence, willingly exposing him to every kind of peril? Victim of his father's rashness, we shall watch this poor youth fall from one sin into another, a prey to every storm that rends the heart; and, after being but too easily drawn aside by the tenderness of his affections, freeing himself from that first chain, ennobled, if vice can be ennobled, by a certain degree of honor and an inviolable fidelity; then fettering himself with new ties, wholly ignominious, passing sixteen years of his life in the most lamentable slavery.

Then, as mental darkness is ordinarily the just punishment of ill-regulated affections, after first quenching, and then openly abjuring the faith of his childhood, we shall see him tossed by every wind of doctrine; enamored, but soon dissatisfied, with ancient philosophy, and rightly so, since it offered but shifting sand, on which his lofty intellect could erect nothing stable. After this he falls into the meshes of a seductive, vile heresy, and for nine years vainly seeks the rest it could never afford; then, weary of so many fruitless efforts,

despairing of the truth without ceasing to love it, discouraged, sad, and sick at heart, he sinks into the lowest abyss of all, that of absolute doubt; and heart, conscience, genius, all are on the verge of destruction; and instead of being Augustine the saint, he is in danger of becoming a sophist, perhaps a Libanius, or at most a Symmachus.

But, wondrous sight! Arrived at that point where all seemed lost, we shall behold him suddenly resume his flight, at first slowly, like a wounded eagle, then quickening his speed, and soaring aloft; beating his wings at the dawn of the light, hailing the newly-found truth with cries of the most sublime eloquence, or rather, with tears and sighs humbly receiving that beauty, always ancient and ever new, which he had known and loved too late; and from the abyss of passion and of doubt soaring, victorious at last, to the loftiest summits of divine light and love.

And when you seek for, or question him as to the cause of this wondrous conversion, there is but one reply,—his mother's prayers, tears, and groans. For after having moulded her son's heart as no mother had yet moulded a child's heart, when warned of the dawn of passion in Augustine's soul, she had, for his sake, gained her mother-in-law's heart, converted her husband, and purified, alas! too late, the noxious atmosphere of his home; and after having followed him to Carthage, Rome, and Milan, joining the most energetic course of action to the most tender and winning words, seeing all was in vain, and that her son, deaf to her entreaties, was falling from abyss to abyss, she resolutely turned to God, and one day, when the danger was most imminent, there issued from her soul, as from

that of the unhappy Agar, a cry so profound and so touching that it moved, as such a cry ever will move, the very Heart of God, and He gave her back her child. She died of happiness, bequeathing to all mothers, who weep as she wept, the secret of her own consolation. It is this side of St. Monica's history that I desire to record, if God, who has graciously inspired my design, will deign to bless and guide my pen.

I may perhaps be asked where I have found the materials for such a history. I rejoin: is it credible that God works such wonders only to leave them in the shade, and kindles such lights but to hide them under a bushel? He Himself has prepared an historian worthy of St. Monica, and who else could this be, save "the son of so many tears"? Augustine loved his mother passionately, spoke of her incessantly, and has embalmed her memory in almost every work that issued from his pen. More than twenty years after her death, his locks silvered by arduous labors and penance rather than by advancing years, the moment having arrived when divine love, which had broken down every barrier and inundated his soul, would seem to have destroyed all other love, his mother's name, his mother's memory, would suffice to move his heart and fill his eyes with tears, even when in the pulpit. Yielding to the charm of these souvenirs, he would discourse of them to his people at Hippo, and his sermons, where one would hardly have looked for such allusions, are full of words of touching beauty, bearing the impress of filial gratitude, and the two-fold mark of genius and of sanctity. It is needless to say that nowhere has he spoken of his mother so fully, with such heartfelt joy and deep emotion, as in his "Confessions." And yet,

in perusing this work, we feel that St. Augustine does not tell all. A species of modesty restrains his pen, and in several passages it is evident that he designedly veils the halo surrounding her, lest a ray of the same glory should be reflected on his own brow. But the heart divines that which he withholds; tradition indicates it, and the Church often hymns the same. She who is herself a Mother, and knows not how to speak coldly of her children, has celebrated St. Monica's memory with eloquence peculiar to herself. The spouse of our Lord; saints; doctors; pontiffs; virgins; celebrated writers; and orators of renown, have each in their turn praised her throughout the long flight of ages, in words worthy of being known. These gems I have gathered, and now present them as an offering to Christian mothers.

The idea of this work did not originate with me, but with one to whom I owe much, a great and holy bishop, who for many years has shed much light and peace upon my path, and who, among other gifts, which I treasure in the secret depths of my heart, has taught me to apply my soul to the science of true greatness, which is nought else but true sanctity. Those who have read the "Life of St. Chantal" will not need to be told that I allude to St. Francis of Sales. In studying his writings I have been struck with his devotion for St. Monica, and the tender enthusiasm with which she had inspired him, and proofs of this will be found in that history. We will only say that he speaks of her in every page of his writings; that he gives her as a model to women living in the world; to wives, mothers, and specially to such as have Augustines for their sons. That when he desired to form Madame de Chantal to

that degree of perfection which God demanded from her, he gave her no other patroness, but desired her to fix her gaze constantly on St. Monica during those first years of widowhood when she was learning to be a saint, even whilst in the world; and she it was whom he gave her as an example when he wished to turn her thoughts aside from the religious life at an epoch when her children were too young to forego a mother's care. Need I say that later on, during the brilliant and perilous youth of Celsus Benignus, when she beheld him forming those friendships and engaged in those duels which made her tremble for his soul, St. Francis de Sales reminds her more frequently and in more touching terms of St. Monica? On the walls of her cell, by the side of the Mater Dolorosa, which he had given her, and which hung beneath her crucifix, he desired her to suspend, and frequently contemplate, the image of that afflicted mother, on whose heart was reposing the son she had saved by her tears. And also, which is not so well known, that when he had quitted this terrestrial scene, leaving the Venerable Mother de Chantal alone with her sorrows and anxieties,—a foundress' anxieties and a mother's griefs,—one day, when the latter were pressing heavily upon her (for it was reported that Celsus Benignus was in danger of being executed, as the Duke de Boutteville had been, on account of his unhappy and incorrigible propensity for duelling), St. Francis of Sales issued, as it were, from his tomb, in order to persuade her to re-peruse the Life of St. Monica. At least, while kneeling weeping at the foot of the altar, she heard a voice, which she recognized as that of her sainted father, saying to her: "Read the Eighth Book of St. Augustine's 'Confessions.'" And in

studying these wondrous pages, in which St. Augustine is seen saved by his mother's tears, she had a presentiment that she too would save Celsus Benignus by dint of prayers, tears, and self-sacrifice, which also came to pass, as will be seen in the above-mentioned life.

This suffices to explain my reasons for writing the present book, and to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to the amiable and holy bishop who inspired me with the idea. If St. Francis de Sales supported, comforted, and strengthened so many weeping mothers by citing St. Monica's example, why should not this same example produce the same fruits now? The world was in a sad condition then; the reformation was rending the bosom of the Church; scandals were multiplying; open and secret apostasy was filling every heart with fear; every mother trembled; and in order to reassure, console, and teach them that there is no peril that a mother can not avert from her child, St. Francis of Sales bid them: "Read St. Monica's Life; you will see what she did for her Augustine, and many things which will console you."

The world is not much happier now than at the close of the sixteenth century; the dangers are scarcely less imminent; a change of principles has been accompanied by a change of manners. The atmosphere with which our young men are surrounded is impregnated with sophisms. The hearth is threatened; the cradle is no longer safe. Never perhaps have wives and mothers, worthy of their mission, been called to such important duties. Will they permit me to tell them, not with the authority of St. Francis of Sales, nor with his charm of language, but at least with a heart which understands and can sympathize with their sorrows: Read

St. Monica's Life; learn from this wife and mother how to pray and weep as she did; never to lose hope, and never to be discouraged; and remember that if the young men of the present day are in such imminent danger, it is because their wives and their mothers do not weep as they should weep.

EM. BOUGAUD,
Vicar-General of Orleans.

ORLEANS,
Vigil of All Saints, 1865.

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THE HISTORY OF ST. MONICA.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMILY AND BIRTH OF ST. MONICA—THE FIRST YEARS OF
HER YOUTH—HER MARRIAGE.

332—353.

THE road leading from the ruins of Carthage to those of Hippo, in passing through the territory of which the ancient city of Sicca Veneria was the centre, traverses one of the most beautiful parts of the earth. The ancients boasted of its fertility, and justly; for in our own day, and after the desert had rolled its sterile flood upon it for a dozen centuries, a few blows of the mattock have sufficed to re-create olive, citron, and orange groves, thickets of roses and vines, along with rich harvests. It has needed no greater effort to raise from their sandy graves countless monuments of the finest Roman art; fragments of statues, shafts of columns, sarcophagi covered with inscriptions, the débris of theatres, baths, temples, of Roman roads; all the vestiges, in short, of a brilliant civilization. After having journeyed for some hours through this *renaissance* of nature, and amid these beautiful ruins of art, one is transported in thought back to the epoch in which nature and art united their marvels; his imagination re-peoples this wonderful

land with that proud race who in Hamilcar, Hannibal, and Jugurtha caused at different times the power of Rome to tremble in the balance; and who later, after having refused all other yokes, accepted that of Jesus Christ, and gave to His church Tertullian, St. Cyprian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and St. Augustine; to her throng of virgins and martyrs, St. Perpetua, St. Felicitas, and many others; and the traveller feels that he indeed presses one of those fruitful soils where, as Virgil sings, the harvests attain a later and less beautiful maturity than man.

Toward the middle of this route, on the slope of two hills, which the rising sun gilds and olive thickets shade, lies an unpretending village, which the Arabs of our day call Souk-Arras.* Its few white cottages have been built on the site of the old Roman city called Thagaste, but they occupy only one portion of it. In the other, which is quite extensive, there is a large plain, formed of several mamelons. Here mighty ruins sleep in the sun, half buried in the sand. Thickets of acanthus, of the carob-tree, and the beautiful angelica grow here and there amid them, and impart a little shade.

From the foot of this plateau stretch vast prairies that are refreshed by numerous rivers hastening to lose themselves in the Medjera, which was the Bragadas of the Romans. Beyond lie sandy wastes which man has not yet reconquered from the desert. A vast forest of mighty oaks closes in the horizon with a curtain of foliage. Beyond it lies the unseen sea, with its calms and its storms.

* That Souk-Arras really occupies the site of Thagaste can be proved from authentic documents at the close of this work.

Here, on these unfamed hills, for, notwithstanding the beauty of its site, no ancient author has mentioned Thagaste, if we except Pliny, who in one choice sentence alludes to the pride of the race which inhabited it; here in the face of these luminous horizons, God placed the cradle of the Saint whose life I have undertaken to relate. It would appear, from His choice of this spot, as if His mind were already occupied with Augustine, as if for him this plateau had been constructed, which rises like an eagle's-nest from an immense plain. And he places St. Monica's cradle here to teach us that in a mother everything is made co-ordinate to her children, even the spot in which she inhales the life which she is one day to impart to them.

Our Saint was born in the year of our Lord 332, eighteen years after the accession of Pope Sylvester, and twenty years after Constantine, the conqueror of Maxentius, had raised the Christian religion to the throne. The Church had just issued from the catacombs; and, as after a long winter, under the first beams of the spring sun, a universal quickening is observed throughout nature, so three hundred years of humiliations and sorrows had prepared the Church to bring forth a number of great saints. The self-same year in which Monica saw the light at Thagaste, St. Jerome was born at Stridon, in Dalmatia. Four years before St. Gregory Nazianzen had been born, one year previous to the birth of St. Basil, and St. Gregory Nyssen was two years old. St. Hilary of Poitiers, and St. Martin of Tours, were a little older than this group of saints,—the former being, at the time of Monica's birth, about to enter his sixteenth year, and preparing for baptism. The latter had almost attained the priesthood.

Neither St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, nor St. Paulin of Nola, were yet born. The pious maidens, whom God destined to the honor of being their mothers, were preparing themselves, by humility and prayer, for the great mission which they did not suspect. Alone, of that brilliant group, had St. Athanasius attained to manhood, and, at twenty-seven years of age, to the See of Alexandria, to govern it for half a century, upright and invincible, and bearing the brunt of the struggle, as if to afford his fellow saints time to attain their maturity. While martyrs were still suffering death in the local persecutions, which Constantine himself could not prevent, and just before the birth of great Doctors of the Church, there appeared in the bosom of a Christian family,—in the home of peace, honor, and antique virtues,—a child privileged beyond all others; for God had chosen her to be the mother of the greatest Doctor of the age, St. Augustine. She received at her birth the name of Monica, a name which no other saint had received, and which she was to make so touching a synonym of consolation and of hope. Of her father's name we are ignorant. Her mother appears to have been called Faconda.* Both were pious Christians.

It is more difficult to define precisely their rank in life. Apparently, they belonged to one of those noble families, such as we see or read of in revolutionary periods, who possess a brilliant past, but little fortune; who keep a retinue of servants, and form fine alli-

* Such is the general tradition in all the Orders which follow the rule of St. Augustine. She is called Feconda, or Facundia, in all the Augustinian Liturgies.

ances, and count illustrious relatives ;* but who, nevertheless, through necessity as well as principle, lead a quiet and secluded life. Twenty years before the time of which we write, when the whole city of Thagaste had been drawn into the schism of Donatus, this family remained devoutly attached to the Catholic Church, a fact which augmented their isolation, while the misfortunes of the empire accelerated their ruin. For a while, it is true, the accession of Constantine and the advancement of Christianity brought to them, in common with all other Christian families who were crushed by heavy taxes, an abatement of these evils ; but in the end the efforts of Constantine proved as abortive as those of Diocletian, and the father and mother of St. Monica saw plainly that of all the antique splendor of their family their daughter would possess only the memory and their name.

With such thoughts, which then filled the world with discouragement and sadness, the father and mother of St. Monica were forced to imbue deeply the soul of

* This is what results from a deep study of the Confessions, and from the corroboration of many important texts ; those, for example, where mention is made of numerous domestics in St. Monica's house (Book 9th, Chapters 8th and 9th), of constant intercourse with the best families (Book 9, Ch. 11), and certain relations of the highest and noblest rank (Letters of St. Augustine, 39th in Edition Benedictine). And alongside those texts are those in which St. Augustine says his patrimony was small (Confessions, Book 2, Ch. 3), and that he was born of poor parents (Sermon 356). This must not be understood literally, for he proclaimed it in his sermon through a sentiment of humility. Noble, but ruined by evils of the times, like all the nobility of that epoch, is what seems to us to have been the true position of St. Monica's family.

their child; and to them, and probably to such circumstances, she owed that early disregard for the world which perishes, and the burning desire for eternal things, which lasted to the end, one of the most beautiful traits in her character.*

However, when St. Monica speaks of her early education, she not only praises the zeal of her mother, she also recalls with gratitude the services of an old servant to whom was confided the care of her infancy. This servant had been the nurse of St. Monica's father; she had carried him on her shoulders as young mothers are accustomed to carry their little children, † and had seen him grow up to manhood and assisted at his marriage. Regarded by him with veneration and honor on account of this, and also because of her age and the purity of her morals, she was chosen to be the servant, or rather the second mother, of his children. Zealous, prudent, austere, somewhat cross and peevish, but ever devoted to her young mistress—a true type of those faithful old servants whom Christianity produced in the world, not the least of its beautiful creations—

* St. Augustine has left us very few details of the youth and the first years of his mother. Happily, tradition supplies them, and makes known to us a certain number of facts of great interest, which tend to delineate accurately the character of St. Monica. These facts are found to be everywhere the same in the oldest documents, especially in the different religious orders who follow the rule of St. Augustine. The Canons regular, of whatever congregation, the Hermits of St. Augustine, the Servites of Mary, the Religious of Prémontré, the Friars Preachers, all preserve and celebrate the remembrance of these facts with such accord that it is impossible to doubt their authenticity.

† Confess., Book IX., Ch. VIII.

she watched with intense vigilance over that cradle which contained destinies so holy and so glorious. Thus guarded from all danger and cultivated with such loving care, flowers and fruit soon crown this tender plant.

While yet very young, Monica would contrive to elude the vigilance of her nurse, and steal away to the church, to seek out a lonely corner in which to stand with clasped hands and head bowed down, finding so sweet a solace in conversing with God as to forget the hour for returning home. When she did return, timid and embarrassed, because she had been out alone and late, she was severely corrected, and sometimes even beaten. But neither blows nor reproaches could draw from her a single plaint, much less diminish the affectionate regard she had for her nurse. Sometimes, when playing with her companions, she would suddenly disappear, and they would find her absorbed in deep meditation at the foot of a tree, having forgotten the sport in prayer.

Often during the night she would rise in secret, and kneeling upon the floor, with clasped hands, recite, with recollection and precocious fervor, the prayers her mother had taught her.* It would appear as if God, by speaking so intimately to her pure heart, desired to familiarize her from her infancy with that divine art of prayer, of which in after life she was to make so wonderful a use. He taught her early how to handle this powerful weapon, with which later she was to strike such wonderful blows.

At this period of her youth, another phase of her

* Boll., 4 Maii.

character developed itself: her intense love for the poor.* Often, at table, she would conceal a portion of the bread served to her, and when she thought she could elude notice, run to the entrance door, seeking for some person on whom to bestow it. There were two kinds of poor for whom she had a great predilection; these were the travelling beggars and the sick poor in hospitals. When she caught sight of the former approaching the hospitable roof of her father, she made them seat themselves on a bench provided for that purpose, and claimed the privilege, according to antique custom, of washing their feet. She visited the latter in their sick-rooms at the hospitals; to both she rendered services extraordinary for one of so tender an age.† Sweetness, gentleness, and heavenly peace beamed from her countenance. When she played with her little companions, it required but a word from her to adjust their little disputes. Her face, her voice, and even her gait, were so calm that she communicated calmness to others much older than herself.‡ To these gifts which came direct from Heaven, and which were God's preparation of her to be the mother of a great saint, other virtues were added which the active and severe vigilance of her nurse made her acquire.

St. Augustine tells us of this nurse in his Confessions: "By exercising strict discipline over her moral conduct, and using a holy prudence in educating her, she inured the child's tender heart to the practice of noble virtues. Be-

* *Breviarium Canonicorum Regularium, etc., ad. prim. Noct. lect. ii.*

† *Boll., 4 Maii.*

‡ *Brev. Heremit Diri. Augustine, 1 vol., 1475, black-letter.*

tween the hours of her modest repasts at her father's table, she was not permitted, were she thirsty, to touch a drop of water," thus habituating her to sobriety, penance, a strength of soul, and a spirit of sacrifice, without which there can be neither true Christian, true spouse, true mother, nor saint. "Behold, O my God, how Thou didst form her, when neither father nor mother suspected what she would one day be. Thou didst place her cradle in the bosom of a pious family, one of the best regulated in Thy holy Church, and therein, under the guidance of Thy Divine Son, she grew up in the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom."*

Amid this sweet refulgence of budding virtue there was visible in Monica's character—I will not say a flaw, but rather a slight shadow—one of those light and trivial faults, which God permits sometimes in order to make the saints more watchful and holy. The maiden was charged, according to the prevailing custom which demanded that young girls should be taught house-keeping, to go to the cellar to make provision of wine for each day. "Now," says St. Augustine, "it happened sometimes that having lowered her small vessel and filled it, before emptying it into the flagon, she would carry it to her lips. But as it is by despising little faults that we fall gradually into great ones, it so happened that by daily drinking a drop more, she finished by drinking almost a cupful. But where was her wise old nurse? What had become of those strict moral rules she had taught her? And what means would have eradicated an evil so concealed, if it

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. VIII.

were not, O Lord, that Thou didst tenderly watch over her, in the absence of father, mother, and all who had care of her? Thou who art always present, and dost save souls even through the instrumentality of the wicked.

“It was generally the custom to send a servant-maid to the cellar with Monica, who consequently had been the complaisant witness of her fault. It was from this servant’s lips that God drew forth a bitter and piercing rebuke, which was the invisible steel that God made use of to cut out this gangrene. As often happens in cases where the mistress is young and inexperienced, one day Monica and this maid, when alone together, had a dispute, during which the latter bitterly and tauntingly reproached her for this fault, calling her, in the most insulting manner, ‘*a wine-bibber.*’ Pierced to the very heart by this poisoned arrow, Monica blushed. She recognized the gravity of her fault, and resolved to commit it no more.”* It is even said that she resolved to never taste any liquid but water throughout her life. Let this be as it may, her fault, as almost always happened in the lives of the saints, was productive of the happiest results.

It drew the first tears of penance from her eyes, kindled in her heart the love of mortification, made her humble and distrustful of herself, and remotely prepared her to exercise the most active vigilance over the glorious cradle which was one day to be confided to her care.

In the meantime, about the year 348 or 349, Monica witnessed an event which filled her with intense joy,

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. VIII.

and helped to ripen in her heart the fruits of her beautiful youth. Thagaste, as we have said, had been drawn into the heresy and the schism of Donatus, but this violent heresy had been the cause of great troubles to her for twenty years. At the point to which we have arrived in this history, the troubles had grown so alarming and so constant, they had become so fruitful a cause of murder and pillage, that the emperors were obliged to interfere. Constantine passed a law forbidding the public profession of this heresy. A great number of the cities then returned to the Catholic faith, and among them Thagaste, evincing so deep, sincere, and unanimous a faith, that it was evident the fear of schismatic violence alone had kept her from its manifestation. "Some years later," says Saint Alypius, "one would have sought vainly in Africa a city more happy and more united in obedience to the Roman Church." *

St. Monica must have been about the age of sixteen years when this happy deliverance of her native city from fanatical oppression was accomplished, and the holiest of liberties—religious liberty—accorded to her. No doubt a deep and sweet enthusiasm filled her being when assisting at this new embracing of her country and the Church, and if this happy time were also, as some have believed, the time chosen for her baptism and First Communion, there must have been aroused in her soul those lofty and heroic emotions which dig an eternal grave for the love of this world.

Time was developing her natural gifts in St. Monica. Her intellect, which was acute, lofty, and penetrating

* August. Ep. 48; Labbe conc., tome II., Cap. CXXXVI.

has been made the subject of the most delicate and unexpected eulogiums by him who was the most capable of judging of it, and who, assuredly, would not have exalted even his mother, at the expense of truth. St. Augustine asserts in several places that St. Monica almost possessed genius. We shall find her later taking her part in the discussion of the profoundest philosophical and religious questions, while St. Augustine and his friends form a circle around her, "as if," says the former, "some great man were in the midst of us." This rare and lofty mind of Monica already began to grow active; she exhibited an insatiable thirst for learning; while very young, she would leave the games of her companions to listen attentively to the conversations of older persons, especially when the persons were serious or learned.

She passed hours together at the feet of her grandmother, a woman venerable both for her age and her faith, and a contemporary of martyrs, of whom her moving recitals awakened the holiest enthusiasms of the pious maiden. Along with these gifts of intelligence which God had bestowed on her in order that she might exert over Augustine all kinds of influence, Monica possessed others better still; an unvarying sweetness joined to a rare firmness, and a peace which nothing could disturb. Her nature was fearless, and at the same time enduring; with a heart overflowing with tenderness, she was energetic in love and in action. Hers, in short, was one of those rich natures which we occasionally see, in which the rarest harmonies are evoked from the most astonishing contrasts.

As to her external gifts, about which we involuntarily ask, even when there is question of a saint, it is difficult

to completely satisfy the legitimate curiosity of the reader. It seems, however, that she was rather tall, and her face very beautiful. At least, between the ages of eighteen and twenty years, piety, modesty, love of God and men, imparted such a radiance to her face, that the author of one of the oldest documents relative to the history of St. Monica, declares himself unable to describe it.*

Of the beauty of the saints, must be said what Holy Scripture says of their peace: *Exsuperat omnem sensum*. It is of an order apart, and beyond all our ideas. The beauty of the just, says the Psalmist, resembles that of temples: it elevates the soul to God.

In Monica its charm was enhanced by the most amiable modesty. Her parents were proud of her, and like the generality of parents, even the most Christian, were anxious to enhance her beauty. But the maiden refused with gentle firmness the precious, perfumed tissues in which they would have clothed her.† She had learned of the great Doctors of Africa, Tertullian and St. Cyprian, the price of simplicity and modesty, and how hard it is to preserve a mortified heart, and a spirit of self-sacrifice, beneath luxurious garments. So she preferred to all these gorgeous stuffs the simple, loose, white robe, without fringe or border, common to all youthful Christian women, and of which the

* I can corroborate this. I once saw a picture of the Saint. Her countenance, naturally, appeared pale and emaciated from her great austerities and fasts; but yet there emanated from it an expression so divinely beautiful, that I could not paint it were I required to.

† Bollandists, 4 Maii.

paintings of the Catacombs afford such numerous illustrations.

And so the earliest youth of Monica passed, a beautiful dawn announcing a more beautiful day. Hardly has she entered the period of maidenhood, than she is sought in marriage. Her parents give their consent to the suitor, and, in the incomprehensible design of God, this youthful virgin whom we should have expected to see follow in the footsteps of Agnes and Agatha, or if remaining in the world, at least contract a happy union, is given to the man who appears to be the least worthy of such an alliance.

Patricius, of whom it now becomes necessary to gain some knowledge, was born at Thagaste. His family and birth are wrapped in a mystery which no writer seems to have been able to clear up; but it is probable that he belonged to an old and noble family, nobler even than that of St. Monica herself. Such at least is the conjecture of ancient writers, who know not how to otherwise explain this marriage; for Patricius was not rich, and the office which he held at Thagaste was less honorable than many historians have declared it to be. He was a Curial, that is to say, one of the municipal magistrates. But this was an office which came with the acquisition of twenty-six acres of land; and which, of no great consequence at any time in small towns, became here extremely onerous, by reason of a law which obliged the curials to collect the impost at their own risk and peril, and supply its deficiencies out of their own earnings. Every one, therefore, strove to elude the formidable honors of the magistracy, in the midst of a needy population which could no longer pay, and in the face of a needy fiscal who would

accept no excuses.* Ruined, then, or on the point of being so, like nearly all the curials of his time, but noble and of an ancient race, such would appear to have been the position of Patricius.

As to his personal qualities, St. Augustine assures us that Patricius had a heart greater than his fortune, † and so it appears in the sequel. But those qualities which we shall see developing themselves, little by little, under the delicate hand of the angel whom God was now about to give him as a companion, were then not only buried in the depths of his soul in a darkness which rendered it difficult to detect them at all, but were also stifled by the most shameful qualities. To begin with, he was a pagan, and that he should have been so, in the middle of the fourth century, shortly after the Council of Nicæa, in the very time of an Athanasius, a Paul, and an Anthony, argues either a most deplorable indifference on his part to the great questions of life, or a blindness caused by secret sins. And, indeed, both of these existed in the soul of Patricius; such indifference to religious things that it required eighteen years of union with a saint to arouse

* Possidius, in his life of St. Augustine says positively that Patricius was a *Decurion*; which is to say, that he was a member of the magistracy, who, in the colonies and municipalities, administered the city affairs. For that purpose they formed a municipal council, *curia decurionum*, and their decrees are referred to in the archives by the signs, "D. D. Decreto Decurionum."

A candidate for the office of civil magistrate had to possess in his own right more than twenty-five acres of land, and be twenty-five years of age.

† Confess., Book IX., Cap. IX.

him from it ; so little perception of vice and of virtue, that to satisfy his pride, he exposed his son to corruption a thousand times ; and joined to this, a violence of character of which we can to-day form no idea. So common was it for visages of noble ladies, relatives and friends of St. Monica, to exhibit bruises, which testified to the brutality of their husbands, that the fact was not thought worthy of comment, and, nevertheless, everybody trembled at the news that Monica was to be united to Patricius, for he enjoyed the reputation of being the most violent and brutal of all.

But this was only a portion of her bitter cup. A man, to be worthy of Saint Monica, to render her happy, and be so himself in her companionship, would have required to experience the Christian love, which filled her heart, to possess the delicacy, the reserve, the modesty, the respect, all those exquisite things which go to make up the honor, the charm, and the holiness of marriage. Now, the life of Patricius had been dishonored by the most shameful weaknesses, into which, alas, we shall see him fall again, almost on the morrow of his marriage.

Let us add, in order that the reader may more fully understand this sad situation, that Monica was twenty-two years of age, and Patricius more than double that number. Taking this fact into consideration, along with the difference of age, and the greater difference of mind, of heart, of character, of taste, and of principle, there is little place left for hope of happiness. All, on the contrary, presaged inevitable sorrow, solitude of mind and of heart ; and because of this solitude, many perils, and perhaps faults. To bear nobly the one, to avoid the other, to transform the shadows into light, required

that this young wife should rise to the practice of the most heroic virtue.

As we read the story of Monica, we involuntarily ask how her parents could have consented to such a marriage. For in truth, life is bitter enough without having its bitterness distinctly augmented, and human nature is too fragile to be thus lightly pledged to heroism. Moreover, since they were Christians, and even pious, it can not be urged that they did not know what marriage should be; and that to chain a pious young girl to a libertine, is to crown her with thorns instead of roses, and to condemn her in her youth to a life-long martyrdom.

The ancients used a punishment which resembled this: they attached a living culprit to a dead body, and enclosed both within the same dungeon.

If the parents of our Saint had considered all those things, which faith, and in default of faith, reason, experience, or surely their hearts must have told them, they would have probably recoiled at the prospect. But I know no circumstances of life in which parents permit themselves to be so easily blinded, as when there is question of marrying their children. Patricius was a pagan, indifferent and utterly unprincipled, but Monica would convert him. He was violent, choleric; but he possessed a good heart. His manners were light; but then he was no longer young, and would, doubtless, grow more sober; besides which, he was of noble blood, of an ancient race, loyal, honest, and honorable; what more was required? And so they doomed a young girl to a life of tears, the more bitter that they must be shed in secret. As for Monica, it is probable that she was ignorant of many of these sad facts. She

believed in her mother, and confided in the judgment of her father. And, like the greater number of young girls, when she laid her hand in that of her affianced husband at the foot of the altar, she was only accomplishing an act of obedience.

There are, however, authors who assert that St. Monica expressed a most intense repugnance to this marriage, that she humbly and respectfully remonstrated with her parents, and that obliged to yield, for God had willed that she should purchase with bitter trials the honor of being St. Augustine's mother; she consoled herself with the thought of helping this poor soul, and sacrificed herself heroically. At least it is certain that after having prayed and received in return—for no prayer is lost—treasures of faith and generosity, she went, ignorant or resigned, to the foot of the altar, bright with the radiance of a virtue which impressed all the beholders.

“Oh! who can describe this young girl at the foot of the altar, pronouncing the sacred vows which devote her life. What holy modesty! What beauty of soul is expressed in her face!”* But such things can not be described; they must be seen, to be realized.

* Bollandists, 4 Maii.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOMESTIC LIFE OF A FAMILY WHICH IS NOT CHRISTIAN
—GENTLENESS AND PATIENCE OF ST. MONICA—GOD CON-
SOLES HER BY MAKING HER THE MOTHER OF THREE
CHILDREN.

355—369.

SAD and heart-rending are the days immediately succeeding an unhappy union. Every day a dream vanishes. Illusions go, one by one, like leaves before an autumn wind. Asperity and opposition in feeling are discovered. If it were not for faith and the love of God, one would succumb to despair.

Previously to her marriage St. Monica had enjoyed peace and tranquillity of mind in her paternal mansion. She little suspected what misery and wickedness reign at the domestic hearth, when God and His religion are discarded, and where wicked passions unchained, make life as stormy and cruel as the raging sea.

Her mother-in-law was yet living, and as if everything tended to make her life more painful, circumstances obliged Monica to live with her. Like Patricius, she was a pagan, and resembled him also in her disposition and character. She was an imperious and violent woman, of a wicked disposition, full of jealousy, such jealousy as mothers-in-law generally manifest. The servants were not behind their mistress in envy and dislike of the innocent Monica. Not daring to vent their anger in the presence of their young mistress, they em

ployed the tongue of calumny to damage her unsullied reputation. For a young woman, twenty-two years of age, meekly and steadfastly bearing with the tyrannical disposition of her husband, this was indeed cruel. It was her deep piety and unshaken devotion to God that buoyed her up against this sea of persecution.

How much more each day revealed to St. Monica the abyss that separated her from Patricius! He understood nothing about the life of his saintly companion. Her prayers and devotions annoyed him; her alms appeared to him foolish and excessive. He considered her eccentric if she visited the poor, the sick, or manifested a sympathetic regard for poor slaves. At every step our Saint encountered a thousand obstacles on her heavenly route; and Tertullian describes those obstacles and severe trials which every Christian woman must encounter who is allied to a man without the saving faith of Christ our Lord.

“How,” says that great observer of men and things, “can a Christian woman serve God and have a man at her side who does not adore Him? If religion calls her to perform her duties at the church, he will appoint a rendezvous at the baths earlier than usual. If she is obliged to fast, he orders a feast on that very day. If she is obliged to go out on some holy errand, the servants were never so busy as on that day. Will this husband allow his wife to go from street to street visiting the poor, her brethren, in their wretched homes? Will he permit her to get up in the middle of the night to assist at the Paschal solemnities? Will he permit her to approach the table of the Lord to receive the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ if it be derided among the pagans? Will he per-

mit her to enter the prisons to kiss the chains of the martyrs for the faith? If she gives anything to strangers or travelers, the granary, the wine-cellar will be closed." (Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*; Lib. iii., Cap. 4.) Sixteen centuries after Tertullian, a celebrated writer* and keen observer, notes the same trials, sorrows, and divisions among families in which the one faith does not reign or exist.

Such was the daily life, or rather suffering, of St. Monica. She would have been resigned to her sad condition, were it not that her soul's purity was in danger.

"But, alas!" continues Tertullian, "how can it be possible that a Christian woman can be allied by marriage to a pagan husband and not be contaminated? She must play the part of a pagan wife. She must display before him all the deceitful charms of beauty, fire his unbridled passions by a meretricious display of gaudy ornaments, her body must be pampered and

*This writer is M. Michelet, who recently said: "The family is the home where we would all wish, after so many useless efforts and vain deceits, to be able to repose in sweetness, calmness, and comfort. We return wearied and fatigued to our cozy little mansion. What are we going to talk about to our mothers, to our wives, to our daughters? The subjects which we speak on are things indifferent in themselves, trivial affairs—the news of the day; but by no means do we speak about what touches the heart, the moral and upright life. We do not speak about religion, the immortal soul, or God.

"If you dare to say a word about these things at table, at fire-side, or in the drawing-room, your mother shakes her head, your wife contradicts you, your daughter, though remaining silent, disapproves of your conversation. They are seated at one side of the table, and you at the other."

adorned to gratify his lascivious eye, and she must lavish on him all that sort of affection which God does not sanction."*

Monica experienced all this almost from the very first moment of her nuptials; and though yet young and peculiarly innocent, she read with wonderful sagacity the heart of her haughty and disdainful pagan husband. A gleam of heavenly light pierced her soul, and she was inspired with the desire of saving this soul not yet moved by the grace of Jesus Christ. Instead of being disheartened, as so many Christian women are; instead of going away from her husband's roof, as the noble Roman lady Fabiola—married to a fearful pagan who pretty closely resembled Patricius—was compelled to do, Monica comprehended that God had not sent her this poor soul for her to abandon it, but that on the contrary it was her mission to cure it, to convert it, and illuminate it. What is the good of marriage, and to what end its dignity, its graces, its supernatural relationship, if they be not for the illumination and sanctification of both souls?

And what avails even natural love, let alone supernatural love, which He never refuses, save to convert the indifferent, the lukewarm, to transform and illuminate the darkened soul with the fire of divine love? "Let him who possesseth the light shed it on him that gropeth in darkness. And let him who is strong in faith aid him who is weak in faith," says the apostle. "And let the dead be raised by him who possesses life." To suffer, sigh, to pour out torrents of tears for the salvation of a soul sitting in the shadow of death,

* Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem*, Lib. II., Cap. IV.

even to offer one's heart's blood for that benighted soul, is noble and precious work in the sight of God. Such thoughts filled the mind of Monica. Her life in relation to her husband was a living martyrdom.

St. Augustine, who relates to us this noble thought of his mother, puts it before us in a more luminous manner in a very few words. Telling us how she succeeded in such a difficult enterprise, he says: "Educated in virtue and wisdom, obedient to God and her parents, as soon as she attained the marriageable age, she obeys with profound regard the husband that Providence had chosen for her; and as she ardently desired Thee to conquer him, O my God, she endeavored to afford him a revelation of Thee in the purity of her manners." To convert him to God she used neither discussions nor reproaches. She endeavored to be sweet, humble, patient, modest, and devoted. Instead of preaching religion with her lips, she made it permeate her life. And a day came when Patricius was no longer able to resist, but was forced to yield to an influence so strong, so discreet, and so true. But time and heroic virtue were required for this.

Monica was perfectly aware of the weaknesses and infidelities of her husband, but never uttered a word concerning them; she suffered in silence. She wept and prayed when he was absent, but she knew it was folly to expect a man who was unfaithful to his God to be faithful to a creature, and contented herself with imploring the gift of faith and divine love for her husband, for she well knew men can not be chaste without these two gifts. When he raged in furious fits of passion, it was always her custom to observe silence, patience, gentleness, and kindness. What could be

said to a man beside himself? She waited until his rage had passed, and profiting by the return of reason and those moments of tenderness by which violent but affectionate and kind-hearted men seek to efface the memory of their rage, she would speak to him, confidently and gently, some words of expostulation and tender reproach, which were nearly always well received. This method of sweetness, this secret of silence and abnegation, she recommended to all her friends when they came to visit her with their faces disfigured and bruised by their young husbands. "Take care of your tongues," she would say to them; and it was manifest that she could well advise them on this point, for there never was a man of more violent temper than Patricius, who yet in all his rage never struck her. At times, in the height of his passion, he would make furious bounds at her, but he never went further. Her benign look always restrained him. And not only did she subdue him, a fact which aroused the admiration of all who knew him at Thagaste before his marriage, but by employing faithfully and patiently this method of meekness, silence, and prayer, she gradually became adorned in the eyes of her husband with a beauty he had not suspected.

This sweetness of disposition; this delicacy of manner; these thousand drops of devotion, falling day by day on the soul of Patricius, formed therein an abyss of love whose depth his wife did not suspect till long afterward. His affection for her—for even at the height of his rage and infatuations he loved Monica—insensibly transformed him. He became elevated and noble, because there entered into his character an element of respect which hitherto had been lacking to it.

“Every day she appeared more beautiful in his eyes,” says St. Augustine, “and that beauty born of virtue began already to gain for her the respect and love and admiration of her husband.” Certainly, Patricius was still far from a reformation in his morals; his conversion was far from being perfect. Many years were to pass away before the germ planted by Monica was to begin to develop. It required a flood of tears to water it, and bitter sacrifices to ripen it. Happily, Monica learned daily by prayer how souls are purchased, and to the virtues we have enumerated she added another, which is the queen and mistress of all, an unbounded confidence in God; an unshaken hope in His assistance, with such a certainty of obtaining it that nothing was able to discourage her.

Amid these sorrows and these first faint hopes, as a consolation for Monica and a link to bind her more closely to Patricius, God sent her three beautiful children. She began to smile through her tears. Her first-born was the son afterward so celebrated under the name of Augustine. He came into the world on the thirteenth of November, 354, when she had herself only attained the age of twenty-two years. It is said that she had a revelation before his birth of the great things he would one day accomplish, if she but knew how to make him faithful to God. And it must be admitted that an attentive study of the Confessions seems to confirm the idea of some such mysterious presentiment, together with the wonderful zeal of St. Monica for her son's conversion, which found expression in incessant prayer and tears, and the tenacity with which she held to the anchor of the hope that she would one day behold her renowned son converted to the true faith.

St. Monica's second child was called Navigius, a sweet and tender youth, who never knew the storms of his brother, and never experienced his penitence and his transports. He never attained to the heights of virtue which his brother reached; but still he has left in the church a veiled memory which is not without charm.

Navigius was well educated, but timid, quiet, and almost always in ill health. He was one of those beings who pass through life more occupied with others than with himself. We shall meet him again throughout the course of this narrative, always at St. Monica's side, her tender consoler and faithful guardian, especially during the wanderings of Augustine.

He appears to have been the father of St. Augustine's nephew, named Patricius, who was sub-deacon of the church at Hippo, and of two nieces of the holy Doctor, who, when quite young, took the veil of the spouses of Jesus Christ. Navigius, at least, caused Monica few fears or troubles, and great consolation.

No mother was ever more solicitous for the temporal and spiritual welfare of her children than St. Monica. It was her daily care to instill into their tender hearts sentiments of piety. Her heart and mind and conversation were in heaven, so it was her sole desire to raise thither the hearts and minds of her dear offspring. Besides Augustine and Navigius, she had a daughter, whom she named after one of the most popular saints of Africa, Perpetua, the celebrated martyr of Carthage.

Unfortunately, history tells us nothing of her life, so that it is impossible to portray her character. It is said she was like her mother, very pious, and was early given in marriage. But that being while still quite young, left a widow without children, she went to dwell with

her brother, Augustine, until the day of his ordination. But on that very day, St. Possidius relates, she left him, for he would henceforth suffer no woman, not even his sister, under his roof. She consecrated herself to God in the religious life, and became superioress of one of the convents founded by St. Augustine. We learn from the letters of St. Augustine that he always gave his sister the title of saint, and that her life from the cradle to the grave exhaled sweet odors of great virtue.

She had, and still has, as well as Navigius, altars dedicated to her honor in Rome and many other places, and her sacred relics, like those of her two brothers, are enshrined in many altars throughout the Christian world.

Such is the faint portrait of St. Monica's family. In vain the pagan husband, the pagan mother-in-law, the male servants and female servants conspire to thwart her holy efforts in endeavoring to bring up her children and give them a sound Catholic education.

Her three children became canonized saints. By this we perceive what a devoted mother, aided by the grace of God, can do when she places her whole dependence on God. What a happiness for children to have been conceived in a heart where the love of God dwells with all other virtues.

St. Monica had been, if not made happy, at least consoled on receiving from God this pious little family. If a sorrow more bitter than what she had already experienced, could afflict her heart at this time, and mingle itself with her joys, and embitter the happiness of her life, it was the renewed recklessness, profanity, and dissipation of her pagan husband.

Patricius plunged deeper and deeper into the mire of

wickedness. Neither the beauty of the heart and soul of his holy wife, the tenderness and force of the affection she exhibited to him, nor the birth of her holy little children could subdue the tyranny of his passions; and, in spite of the entreaties and tears of St. Monica, Patricius began to parade his vices. How can we describe her sufferings as a wife, a mother, and a Christian?

Hers was the martyrdom of soul of which St. Ambrose speaks, whose scene is the household, but whose intensity of suffering is as deep as any martyrdom of the body. But nothing could make our Saint swerve from the line of conduct which she had marked out for herself. Forsaken in the flower of her age, betrayed by the father of her children, Monica, who saw vanish, at twenty-seven years of age, all the sweet hopes which she had cherished, redoubled her fervor and confidence in God; and far from changing her wonted modesty and silence, her discretion, and sweet and devoted affection in regard to her husband, increased them, and began to devote her time and attention to the moral and religious education of her children.

Every mother naturally loves her child, but those who have experienced in the marriage state only abandonment and cruelty, love their children with a love which mothers blessed with kind and loving husbands, can not comprehend.

And if the age in which God made them mothers, and unhappy ones, is a wicked age: if in bringing them forth on the scene of a wicked and corrupt world they feel they are soon to deposit them among the wicked and corrupted; far more dangerous to their innocence when their fathers will not shield and protect them

from the baleful influence of a wicked world; nothing can give any idea of their tender care, of the vigilance of their prayers, and the precautions they have recourse to in order to protect and save the souls of their children. This is the spectacle that will be presented to our view in the course of this recital. Unfortunately a thick veil hides from our view the youthful lives of Navigius and Perpetua.

Let us then, though unwillingly, take leave of these two children of our Saint, and fix our attention on the cradle and boyish years of St. Augustine.

It is needless to say that Monica did not wait to begin her son's education until he was able to speak. She had not even waited until he was born. At the first intimation of the happiness which God was about to bestow on her, she began to reflect on her duty, and having learned from the "Lives of the Saints," a book she continually studied, that during the long months before her child's birth she could sanctify it and baptize it in the love of God, she redoubled her vigilance, piety, and purity of heart, in order that this soul should receive only holy impressions.

Alarmed, and with reason, at the responsibility thrown on her, she flew to God for light and strength to enable her to accomplish the great work undertaken by her. Night and day she offers to God, on the altar of her pure heart, her dear child. What a model she is to all Christian mothers for imitation and example.

"St. Monica," says St. Francis of Sales, "being pregnant of the great St. Augustine, dedicated him, by many offerings, to the Christian religion, and to the service of God's glory, as he himself testifies, saying that he had 'already tasted the salt of God in his mother's womb.'"

This touching, feeling expression, *ab utero matris meæ*, from my mother's womb, recurs in almost every page of the Confessions. If St. Augustine learned to love Jesus,—if the fibres of his heart continually vibrated for God and truth; if in the midst of his unhappy wanderings there yet remained in his heart the sparks of honor—that could not be extinguished—if he had contempt for whatever was low and mean, he never ceases to repeat that he acquired these traits from the womb of his mother,—as if he desired us to know what had been, during those nine months, the beauty, the elevation, and the saintly grandeur of the thoughts and sentiments of his mother.

As soon as he was born, Monica had him brought to the church, for though it was not then the custom to baptize children or infants at the moment of their birth,—as we see by the history of Constantine, Theodosius, St. Ambrose, St. Martin, St. Eusebius, and a host of others,—she desired that at least his name should be placed on the list of Catechumens,—that is to say, of those who aspired to holy baptism. In the meantime, while waiting for Jesus Christ to take possession of His temple, which, after its brief dedication to strange gods, was to become so glorious, the cross was engraved on his brow, and the symbolic salt placed on the lips which were to interpret one day so sublime a faith.

It is needless to state that such a mother would not permit her child to be nourished on strange milk. She would have dreaded lest some baleful influence should render all her efforts unavailing to accomplish a work whose difficulties she justly estimated. She therefore kept Augustine on her own chaste heart, tasting what he terms felicitously, “the delights of maternal milk.”

With this milk, he drank in the Name and the love of Jesus Christ, and he who already in the womb of his mother, had been subjected to the mighty influence of that mother's profound faith, had the happiness of receiving amongst the caresses of his infancy, a second impression no less mysterious and more profound than the first.

Happy the children who thus begin their heavenly life with their earthly one, and who from the moment of their entrance into this world read faith, purity, honor, and virtue in the eyes of their mothers.

St. Augustine paints this happiness of his infancy in some words full of charm: "Whence came I, O my God, into this dying life, or, if it be preferable, this living death? I am ignorant; what I know is that at my entrance here I was received into the arms of Thy tenderness, as I have learned from my father and mother, in whose heart I reposed for a time." And after this delicate tribute he adds: "Then I received a second grace which was the sweetness of tasting the milk of my mother. Be Thou blessed, O my God, for it was not she who placed this nourishment in her breast. It was Thou who gave me this nourishment through her. Thou didst incline me to desire it in the measure in which I needed it; Thou didst incline her to impart it to me. Love inspired her to communicate to me without measure what she received without measure; and by an admirable law, in making me happy she became happy herself. And with the milk which I drank with so much delight, my heart drank lovingly the name of Jesus Christ. I know all this now. But then, ingrate, what did I know? To drink the milk, to relish its sweetness, to weep when I suffered. Nothing more!"

But the care so affectionately manifested by St. Monica for her darling child was but a prelude to that great work with which God had charged her. What was above all—and that quickly—to be accomplished, was to form and direct the tender conscience of Augustine. The time was not far distant when he was to pass from maternal instructions to witness and partly imitate the example of his father; when he was about to step down from his mother's lap and tender caresses, to enter a society deeply corrupted, and highly capable of corrupting; through which assuredly he could not pass safe and sound without having a conscience finely and piously tempered.

Thus, in order to form this conscience, Monica constantly placed before the eyes of her child the grand principles of faith, the brilliant and steady light of the Gospel.

She endeavored to transmit to him a treasure which she had received from her ancestors; it was the despising of earth and all that passes away. She unceasingly directed his thoughts to heaven, and endeavored to dig abysses in his youthful soul which nothing save God should be able to fill. We know how she succeeded. That delicacy of perception which ever brought disenchantment to his heart, the perpetual return of his soul upon itself, the profundity, and the melancholy, which give so much even of human beauty to the soul of Augustine, expressed in those sublime exclamations, "O my God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are so agitated that they can not repose in Thee!" all was imbibed from the teachings of his mother.

To this teaching, which, renewed each day, could not fail to do its work in the heart of her son, Monica joined

another, designed to fill his heart with tenderness. She spoke to him unceasingly of God's love, of the cradle into which "it made him descend," the cross on which it hung him bleeding, that we might receive its full measure. Let us imagine such teaching from the inspired lips of a saint sinking into so tender and loving a heart as Augustine's. So profound was the impression it made that never, even in the midst of the errors and passions of his youth, could Augustine forget this sublime and appealing picture of our Lord "descending through humility to our pride."

To make him reject with disgust even the most beautiful book, it was sufficient, as we shall see, for him not to find therein the name of Jesus Christ.*

At the same time, before arousing this tenderness in her son's heart, Monica endeavored to inspire him with a horror of evil, a hatred of all that could stain the heart and degrade it. And with the self-abnegation of mothers, who dread no humiliation where there is question of preserving their children, she confessed to him her own faults. She related to him in particular, the affair of the wine, the cellar into which she descended, the small vessel which she carried to her lips, all the humiliating story, in short, happy if, at this price, she succeeded in inspiring her son with a fear of the least peril, and a horror of the lightest faults.

It was by speaking to him in this way while holding him on her lap, by dwelling frequently on the vanity of the things of earth, the infinite love of God, the malice of evil, the horror of vice, that she developed, little by little, the soul of Augustine; that she formed the con-

* Confessions, Book III., Chap. IV.

science of which he could never rid himself, although he strove to do so in the hope of peace, at least, if happiness were unattainable; which made itself heard everywhere, and, like the bloody arrow in the vitals of a stag, tormented him without ceasing, until he returned, vanquished and penitent, to receive peace, honor, dignity of soul, purity, and joy from the God of his cradle and of his mother.

An incident of St. Augustine's youth which has come down to us shows that, despite the infidelity of his father, the sentiments of faith were deeply implanted in his soul; but shows us also how difficult, notwithstanding her piety and wonderful tact, was the position of St. Monica.

Let us cite a few words from the Confessions. They afford a perfect picture: "When I was yet a child, one day I was suddenly seized with so terrible an illness of the stomach, that they thought I was going to die. In this condition Thou knowest, O my God, Thou who hast ever been my protector, with what a transport of love and faith, I asked to receive the baptism of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, my Lord and my God. I besought it of my mother; I asked it of the Church, which is my mother also; I begged them to hasten."

Behold this child between the ages of seven and eight years, in a dying state, tormented by terrible suffering, yet thinking of nothing but God, his soul, and eternity. Perhaps the mother, under such circumstances, is more admirable: "My mother was overwhelmed with grief," says St. Augustine. "And why? What affected her to such a degree? Was it the fear of seeing her son die? Yes, without doubt, for she was a mother; but Thou, O my God," continues St.

Augustine, "knowest she was more anxious that my soul should enter into the joy of the Lord than she had been to behold me come into the world; her pure heart hastened to bring me forth a second time by procuring for me through baptism eternal life. So she became like one distracted, asking with loud cries for the grace of baptism for me, in order that I might be purified from my childish faults, and that I might make a profession of believing in Thee, O Jesus, who art my Saviour."

In presence of so vivid an outburst of faith on the part of the child and the mother, what St. Augustine adds is astonishing: "In the meantime, the pains had ceased, and when they found the danger had passed they thought no more of baptizing me"; and in fact he was not baptized until twenty years later.

We should say rather that this would be astonishing were it not that, in spite of the discreet and delicate reticence of St. Augustine, we see here the interference of Patricius. In the hour of Augustine's danger, he had allowed Monica to have her way. He was too indifferent at heart to the concerns of religion, and, be it added, too much a man of honor, and too generous, to restrain liberty of conscience in his child on the border of the tomb, and add to the mother's sorrow in losing him the infinitely bitterer woe of seeing his eternity shadowed and his salvation compromised. But as soon as the danger had passed, the pagan reappeared in Patricius, and he signified his wish that the baptism should be deferred until later.

Monica did not insist, for with Patricius she knew insistence was not advisable; and so long as the Church tolerated this custom, and she was not free to follow

any other, she resigned herself in silence. Let us add that the sad state of the society into which Augustine was to enter, the schools which he was obliged to attend, the books, the theatres, the games from whose influences it would be absolutely impossible to keep his mind and heart, helped her to accept her disappointment courageously. For, if such was the utter corruption of society, that only by fleeing to the desert and refusing to learn to read, as St. Anthony had done shortly before, could a young man hope to avoid succumbing to its temptations, and if the words of St. Paul, which make all Christian mothers tremble, are true, that faults committed after baptism are more grave, falls are greater, stains more difficult to efface, why hasten to administer baptism? Were it not better to reserve this all-powerful grace for the day in which Augustine, if he chanced to wander, should return to faith and virtue? "My mother thought of all this," says St. Augustine, "and knowing for what temptations, for what floods and storms I was necessarily reserved, she consoled herself by thinking that in place of delivering up to them the image of Jesus Christ, she would abandon to them only the rude clay which was one day to be imprinted with His image."

Only, in resigning herself to this perilous plan, that the will of her husband imposed on her, Monica felt that she contracted an obligation yet more strict than before, to watch over the soul of her son. Warned, therefore, by the danger he had just passed through, rejoiced also and encouraged by the brilliant flame, she had beheld in Augustine, she resolved not to lose one moment of life. Sacrificing more and more the sad pleasures of the world, she became his guardian angel

and visible providence. But she did not confine her watchfulness to this point alone. So that nothing might be a barrier to her in the prosecution of her great work, the moral and religious well-being of her son, St. Monica applied herself more than ever to gain over by her meekness, patience, and mildness her pagan husband, her pagan mother-in-law, relations, and domestics, and make them—who could tell?—auxiliaries, perhaps, in her great work.

Her mother-in-law was the first she gained over to her cause. This woman was haughty, disdainful, and imperious. The false reports of her slaves had embittered her against her daughter-in-law.

By the gentleness of her manner, the sweetness of her disposition, and her respectful attentions, Monica overcame her mother-in-law's repugnance. The latter's prejudices melted away little by little. Without St. Monica's knowledge, she went to Patricius to denounce to him the malice of those wicked tongues which had sought to destroy their domestic peace. Patricius' ire was roused and he had the servants flogged, after which she warned them publicly that whoever should hereafter dare to prefer any charge against her daughter-in-law should receive the same correction. From that time their tongues were silent concerning Monica, who began to live in peace and harmony with her mother-in-law. But the servants had been silenced by fear; Monica strove to silence them through love. She gained their hearts, and saw herself tended by them with a fidelity full of tenderness.

It was not only over her relatives and servants that she soon gained an ascendancy. "Thy faithful servant, St. Monica, whose womb, thanks and praise be to Thee,

O my God, gave me life," says St. Augustine, "had now obtained from Thee a more precious gift. Amid dissensions and animosities, she intervened to pacify." Thus she became by degrees the confidant of the whole neighborhood. Everybody came to her to expose sorrows and domestic trials. Some, filled with resentment, came to her to give vent to it. She heard them patiently and meekly, and dressed their wounds with most delicate touch. No one knew better how to reconcile and settle family quarrels. Her great art consisted in silence. Whatever was confided to her sank deep into her soul, as into those fathomless wells whence nothing flows. If sometimes she repeated something of a former conversation, it was only when it was of a nature to calm resentment or to cicatrize a wound.

St. Augustine continues: "I here praise my mother for a virtue which would appear to me quite insignificant, if a sad experience had not taught me how vast is the number of those who take delight in repeating the words of an excited enemy to an offended and irritated man. But what is worse, so as to fan the flame of dissensions, they embellish and magnify them; while, on the other hand, it would not be difficult to quench these flames of anger and bitterness if they would but use soothing words between the irritated parties. It was in this way my mother always acted," adds St. Augustine, "because Thou, O my God, instructed her, in the secret school of her heart." In a word, peace radiated from her, and her house resembled those sanctuaries which are guarded by silence, and which fill with their calmness those who carry thither their griefs and their agitations. But it was especially in relation

to her husband that she employed the energies of her beautiful soul and the richness of her admirable method. He was a pagan—she wished to lead him back to God ; he was a father—she wished to associate him in her work, or obtain, at least, that he should not oppose her.

St. Augustine has depicted, in a few words full of charm, this gift and the art by which St. Monica triumphed over the extreme difficulties of her position. "At that time," he says, "I believed ; my mother also believed ; the whole house believed with us ; my father was the only one who did *not* believe." Behold the interior of a family in the fourth century. Alas ! it is the interior of many families in our own day. But listen to the words that follow—how beautiful and true they are—with what consolation they are capable of filling and consoling certain souls : "Nevertheless," continues St. Augustine, "my father was never able to conquer in my soul the ascendancy my mother had gained over me ; and powerful as was the example he gave me, he could not succeed in turning away my thoughts from believing in Jesus Christ, in whom he did not believe."

That is what will always happen when the mother is a true Catholic woman. Between the father who does not believe and the mother who believes, the child will never hesitate ; it will believe with its mother.

Monica, who knew that later it perhaps would not be so ; that passions attack and carry away more rapidly the young man who has a precedent in the conduct of his father, and who knew also how propitious a time is childhood for forming the heart of the youth, took advantage of every opportunity. "She taught me," says

St. Augustine, "to put God above all, even above my father; to listen to Him only; to love Him with a love superior to all other love."

She exhibited toward her husband thoughtfulness and infinite delicacy. Obligated sometimes to contradict and resist him in things concerning faith, she served him with all the greater humility and sweetness. Better than he—that is to say, more intellectual and more virtuous—she declared that her greatest joy and delight was to be his servant; and if she often made great sacrifices, she found a recompense in the liberty which she obtained to engender a deep religious faith in the heart of her boy. To this end she devoted all her time, and with her whole heart, so that her life was spent for God and her child.

Her child on earth; her God in heaven! To educate one, to contemplate the other, to love both; this sufficed her. And what more was needed to console her for all that was lacking in her life?

But, alas! anxiety begins to mingle early with a mother's joys. The period during which she has her child to herself is so brief! Augustine had hardly passed his infancy, and already they began to talk of his commencing his studies. St. Monica, who dreaded lest in forming his mind they should deform his soul and heart, was in no haste to part with him. She confided him to the masters who inhabited Thagaste, and who were charged with teaching him, under her direction, the first elements of letters.

One would have thought that a genius so brilliant and so profound would have kindled, so to speak, at the very first words of a teacher, and that in his capacity of pupil, at least he would give only joy to his mother

but it was not so. What first appeared was an insurmountable laziness, a disgust for study, which nothing could overcome. To learn to read, to write, to repeat continually: one and one make two; two and two make four, appeared to him insipid and odious. The study of grammar was equally distasteful, and if we except the Latin language, the knowledge of which he acquired without effort, and almost unconsciously, amid the caresses, the smiles and play of his boyhood, and the Punic tongue, which he loved because it was the tongue of his mother and of his country; he evinced the most decided distaste to all study. His masters, employed, by turns, menaces and chastisements to force him to work. But these severities only served to redouble the boy's horror of study, and made him employ ruses and falsehoods to deceive his father, mother, and masters.

Alarmed by these first indications of evil in the soul of Augustine, and sensible that some other incentive than fear was needed for so noble a nature, Monica conducted her son to the "servants of God"; "men of prayer," that they might supply him with higher motives through which to surmount his aversion to study.

"I learned of them," says St. Augustine, "to conceive of Thee, O my God, as a supreme being, who, without appearing to our eyes, can nevertheless come to our aid. I commenced then to implore Thee to become my refuge and support in my troubles, and I prayed to Thee, child as I was, with no little fervor, to save me from being whipped at school. Alas! Thou didst not always save me, and this was for my good. And all, even my parents themselves, laughed at my terror of the ferule—a bagatelle to them, but for me at that time a great trouble and terror."

Unhappily, this aversion to study was not Augustine's only fault. An intense pride manifested itself through the timidity and reserve which were natural to him, along with a passionate love of success and praise, and a peculiar appetite for play and pleasure. "I deceived my parents and my masters with a thousand falsehoods. I grieved them by my love of play, my violent passion for shows, and desire of imitating what I saw there. I stole from the store-room and the table of my parents, either to satisfy my greedy appetite, or to give to children who procured me pleasures which we enjoyed together. At play, I gained the victory by unfair methods, such was my desire to excel all others. But although I employed deceptions myself, I had no intention of permitting myself to be deceived. If I detected my companions endeavoring to overreach me, I overwhelmed them with reproaches. Were I detected myself, I took refuge in anger from the admission of my fault."

In a word, all the old pagan blood which had come to him from his father, was beginning to boil in his veins.

Let us hasten to add, that along with these faults, Augustine mingled some fine qualities. He loved truth. He was sensible, affectionate, and grateful. He returned with interest the affection manifested toward him. He loved his mother. And all alike, good qualities and bad, evil instincts and good, were becoming active in his soul as he entered boyhood. Which would triumph? The old pagan blood of his father, or the Christian sap which his mother had mingled along with it? Or rather, which would have triumphed had he not been subjected, in the first years of his life, to a holy and penetrating influence; and if with his increasing peril,

the ardent prayers and vigilance of Monica had not increased?

It was in the midst of this uneasiness that our Saint found herself obliged to part with her son for the first time. Augustine was growing, and Thagaste was a small city, and possessed insufficient resources for the education of a young man. Moreover, Patricius was proud of his son; for, in spite of his indolence, Augustine was already considered a boy of great promise. He therefore resolved, in spite of his small fortune and the sorrow it would cause Monica, to send the boy where he would receive an education commensurate with his talents.

There was a city, six leagues from Thagaste, which possessed traditions of taste and some degree of culture—Madaura,* the city of Apuleius. Its Forum, enriched with statues of all the gods, was bordered with celebrated schools. Monica conducted Augustine thither, and after having counselled him with fervor, and shed the tears which all mothers shed under such circumstances, left him, her only consolation the thought that he was not far from her, and that at the first intimation of peril she could hasten to him. She did not dream that the evil from which she had so carefully preserved him in childhood, but whose first symptoms she had already detected, was to assume such proportions in the soul of her son during this brief separation from her.

* Called in our day Madaourouche, and distant twenty-eight miles from Souk-Arras. Ptolemy calls it Maduros. In a sketch of Numidia a bishop of Maduros is mentioned (Mataurensis Episcopus.)

CHAPTER III.

YOUTH OF AUGUSTINE—BEGINNING OF THE CRISIS OF HIS PASSIONS—ITS CAUSES, ITS PROGRESS, ITS CULMINATION—TO CONSOLE ST. MONICA, AND AID AUGUSTINE, GOD INSPIRES PATRICIUS TO TAKE HIS FIRST STEP IN RELIGION—HE ABJURES PAGANISM.

368—370.

“I WILL recount my past faults and the miserable pleasures which destroyed the beauty of my heart. And I am led to the recital of them, O my God, not through love of them, but that I may not cease to love Thee. For I love Thee now, O my God, and it is through the influence of this love that I will go over in memory, with bitterness and sorrow, the disorders of my youth, in order that the sad remembrance of them may cause me to relish thy sweetness, O, true delights, of which I enjoy to-day so much assurance.” It is in these humble and magnificent words that St. Augustine begins to depict the awakening of passion in his soul; that formidable crisis which began in secret at Madaura about 368, which progressed openly at Thagaste during 370 and 371, and culminated, finally, at Carthage, in 372, in a miserable infatuation which lasted for fifteen years. But we must hear portrayed by himself, with all his eloquence, the origin of this crisis, its progress, its fearful consequences, and so gain some insight into what are sometimes the sufferings of a mother.

When Augustine arrived at Madaura he could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen years of age. We are ignorant of what gave the impulse to his genius, or whether it had already begun to grow active at Thagaste; but it is certain that after Augustine had mastered the elements, and begun to acquire knowledge of the great masterpieces of eloquence and poetry, he changed completely. His repugnance to study vanished. He opened Virgil, Homer, Cicero, Ovid, and his genius awakened. Virgil especially influenced him deeply. He could not read of the sorrows of Dido without shedding tears. If, to avoid arousing this sensibility, they forbade him to read the book, he wept; if, yielding to his entreaties, they permitted him to again peruse it, he wept still more. His soul, possessed of exquisite tenderness and deep sensibility, found here its greatest delight.

He appears to have been less attracted by Homer. "This gentle deceiver," he says, "was bitter to my childhood." This was not because Augustine did not comprehend the difference between Virgil and Homer, that the latter is greater, naturally more sublime, and exhibits in the succession of pictures which make up his work, a deeper and wider grasp; but, as he himself says, the difficulty which he experienced in learning the Greek tongue, made the sweet fables bitter, and prevented him from enjoying fully all that is charming and ingenious in the beautiful fictions of the greatest of poets. Perhaps, too, the exquisite sensibility of Virgil, no deeper than that of the Greek poets, but more modern in its expression, appealed more strongly to his soul. However this may be, it is certain that during this period of his life, and indeed always, his predilections

were for Virgil. He read, also, with diverse sentiments, Terence, Plautus, and Ovid; he breathed all their fragrance, drank in all their poetry, and opened his soul to all their beauteous images, and, at the same time, to all their dangers, for, alas! poison may be drunk from cups of gold.

To develop the talent of the pupils, they were frequently directed to turn into prose the ardent expressions of Juno, or the passionate complaints of Dido. The prize was to him who expressed most forcibly the anger, the complaints, or the passions of these imaginary personages, made them appear most natural, and clothed their great thoughts in the most beautiful language. Here Augustine triumphed signally, as he learned from the applause of his masters and fellow-pupils.

If, in our day, after the calming influences of three hundred years of Christianity, such precautions are necessary to save the youthful heart from being inflamed, what were the dangers in that time when editions were not expurgated, and professors were not Christian, and the theatres undertook to supply vivid renderings of all that the masters themselves could not give perfect expression to?

The Church had just emerged from the Catacombs; it had not as yet purified either books or schools, so that the young continued to be brought up as the pagans had been. Many mourned over it, but custom, queen of the world, prevailed over the uneasiness of fathers, and the tears of mothers. "O, hellish torrent of custom," says St. Augustine, "shalt thou never be stemmed? Whither dost thou draw the children of Eve on this vast and perilous sea, which they who are marked with the sign of the cross, traverse with great

difficulty? Have I not read of a Jupiter at once thundering and adulterous? Not surely that the divine power could ever be united to such a corruption of morals, but they have armed with false thunders a wicked, corrupt man so as to induce us to imitate his crimes. Have I not heard a Terence, introducing on the stage a young debauchee exciting himself to impure actions by the example of the master of the gods, saying to himself: 'A god, and what a god! has given himself up to this pleasure, and I, a poor mortal, should I be ashamed to imitate him? certainly not!'

"And men reward and applaud such lessons. The Forum is open to their teachers! They are openly given in the face of law. Salaries are ordered for the reward of the actors. And who does not see what an incentive such vile, lascivious expressions are to lead youth to the practice of vice? It is not," continues St. Augustine, "with that good sense and moderation which are a necessary part of genius that I condemn the sayings of the poets and the orators. Their words are like rich and precious vases. But I condemn the impurity of the wine they poured into those golden vessels for us to drink. The masters themselves were already intoxicated, and yet they struck us if we failed to drink, and we were not even allowed to appeal to a sober judge. And nevertheless, O my God, I who in divine presence examine and reflect upon the enormities of my past life, I willingly learned all they taught me, wretch that I was!"

It is not difficult to imagine what a deep impression the reading of such books, and the witnessing of such lascivious spectacles made on the mind of a young man so susceptible and tender-hearted, unbaptized and re-

moved from a mother's care, having no protector against the terrible dangers into which his masters or teachers plunged him, as they themselves were more inebriated with the wine of voluptuousness and impurity than himself.

"What wonder, then," he cries out, "that I should have lost myself in the midst of vanities; and that far from Thee, O my God, I should waste myself on creatures, when they gave me for my guides men who would have blushed as deeply in recounting a good action as for having uttered a solecism; and who, displaying in the recital of their debaucheries the richness of a profound art and a brilliant eloquence, gloried in and rejoiced at the vain applause of a licentious multitude.

"Behold how I, unhappy youth, was exposed on the threshold of life, and under what sad apprenticeship I fought the combats through which I had to pass." Very soon, indeed, the poison began to circulate in the veins of Augustine. Just in the flower of youth, hardly entered on his fifteenth year, that charming and perilous age when the heart expands, but droops also like a flower, he felt himself troubled by vague desires. "I cherished only one dream,—to love and be loved." But he adds, humbly, "I did not merely desire this within the limits of a chaste and luminous friendship, in which soul loves soul. The gross vapors which arose from the lower regions of my being so obscured my heart that I could no longer distinguish between the sentiments of a legitimate affection and the shameful images of a culpable love. And so a devouring fire raged within me, and my youth, carried by the strength of passions amid rocks and precipices, plunged into the abyss of shameful sins."

Little by little impure thoughts invaded his mind; and as there was no one to pluck them up by the root, they grew rapidly. "Still a youth," he says, "I commenced to long ardently for criminal pleasures, and had no shame in wasting my life in criminal joys. The beauty of my soul vanished, and I was only a wound in Thy eyes; but this did not hinder me from pleasing myself, and seeking to please in the eyes of men." Only, timid and naturally reserved, he veiled the most profound disorders of his soul; and none, not even his fellow-pupils and friends, dreamed of the storms which desolated his heart.

Meantime his success was increasing. His soul, already touched but not yet consumed by evil, appeared more beautiful each day. His eloquence commenced to make itself felt; and everybody predicted that, when his powers should be completely developed, he would eclipse the most illustrious rhetoricians.

Patricius was overjoyed on hearing this news, and even, as he had already removed his son from Thagaste to send him to the more learned schools of Madaura, now resolved to make an effort to send him, not to Rome, for that was beyond his means, but to Carthage, where he would enjoy the advantages of fine schools, learned masters, great libraries, and a numerous concourse of chosen and polished young men, all of which were necessary for the development of his mind. Unhappily, to accomplish such a design, it did not suffice to have a heart as generous,—and, let us add, a pride as great,—as that of Patricius. He was not rich, and it required economy, privations, and consequently time to accomplish his project, so that at the end of the year 369, when the schools closed, Pratricius recalled his son from

Madaura, and kept him home for a year. During this time a sum of money, sufficient to defray the expenses of so long a journey, was to be gathered together. Augustine, therefore, returned to Thagaste, and we can imagine with what joy he was received by his mother. As yet she knew nothing; and beholding once more her darling boy, crowned with literary laurels and sparkling with genius, she felt the pride which every mother, even the humblest, experiences under such circumstances. Believing him innocent, she could confidently kiss his smooth open brow, over which fifteen years had now passed.

If Augustine had been still innocent and pure, or if he had had the courage to avow to his mother the first dawning of his passions at the time when his studies were suspended, it would have been well for him. His mother would have regained her influence, and prepared him to confront the dangerous society of Carthage. But there was nothing more deplorable than the sad state his soul was in,—the wicked resolutions he had taken to conceal from his mother the passions that silently nestled in his heart. Now at his paternal home, in the sluggish and inactive life he led, without study, his heart became a void, his mind devoted to revery. This helped to arouse the dormant passions lurking in his young heart.

“In the sixteenth year of my age,” he says, “the necessity of some domestic affairs constrained me to interrupt my studies, and return to the house of my father and mother. The briars of impure desire, which hitherto only had stung and pricked my soul, now suddenly grew up and elevated themselves into rank weeds above my head.” And as there is nothing that enfeebles

more in the soul the thought, and especially the love of God, than the growth of the passions, he heard the voice of conscience less. "As a punishment for my infidelity," says he, "the noise of the chains of my captivity rendered me almost deaf to Thy voice, O my God; and deprived of the great resources and the great strength that flow from Thee, I felt myself more and more devoured by the wicked fire of concupiscence. My heart was all on fire," he continues, with a brilliancy of style absolutely untranslatable; "it was boiling and seething with iniquity.

"It overflowed with the mad surgings of impurity; it became confirmed in evil. Oh! Thou, my joy, too late; I did not hearken to Thy sweet, penetrating voice, and further and further I drifted from Thee." Joyfully can it be said, and it must redound to the honor of St. Monica, who formed and educated his heart, that Augustine, amid all his carnal joys, was never happy. His first transgressions were accompanied by a glorious and happy sadness. He suffered cruelly. He sought peace and happiness; he found not even pleasure.

After the mad delirium of sensual joy, he awoke as from a bad dream, horrified at himself.

"Thou, O Lord, didst pour gall of sorrow and bitterness on all my guilty pleasures, so that by this means Thou mightest gain me over to seek after and taste those joys, those pleasures which are delightful, heavenly, and without remorse."

True happiness is not to be found in the forgetfulness of God. Whilst Augustine forsook his God he lost his liberty and became a slave to his unbridled passions. That brilliant vision of pleasure presented

to his disordered imagination plunged him into mists of doubt and dissipation; it led him into the mire of sensuality. He says, "I thought myself a freeman, unhappy wretch that I was, whilst I was forging my chains. By the use of my pretended liberty, I placed a weight of iron on my head that I could no longer shake off, and I was bound by the thick cords of my obdurate will."

"Behold," says Bossuet, "what a degrading servitude the great Augustine was subjected to whilst he enjoyed in the world the liberty of rebels."

In that deplorable state he often had recourse to prayer. He lifted up his heart, broken by dissipation, to heaven; his shackles were moved by the sorrow of his heart. He implores strength from on high to deliver him from the abject slavery to which his unruly passions have reduced him.

But he trembled for fear that he would be heard too soon. He cried out aloud to God, "O God, I beseech that Thou wilt grant me the grace of chastity and continence," but with the same breath he adds, in a low, smothered tone, "Not now; not yet awhile." Guilty and miserable, yet shrinking from being healed, the corruption under which he groaned became more and more unendurable.

Such was the sad state of Augustine at the age of sixteen. Three or four years of enervating vice had almost destroyed the work and moral influence of St. Monica, in the heart of the young Augustine. We are not astonished at it, when we consider that the causes were always at hand which led to the ravages of the soul. The religious indifference of a father who up to this time cared little about the innocence or morals of

his son, provided he excelled in his studies and became an eloquent and brilliant orator, Augustine's teachers caring only to cultivate the natural man, to fire his imagination with vain and heathenish conceptions; the reading of dangerous, immoral books, and the frequentation of still more dangerous plays, the culpable friendships of which he now began to feel the influence—along with the fact, mentioned not in blame, but in pity, of his mother being married to an infidel, and, therefore, subject to a tyrannical will which prevented her from conducting her son's education; and the absence of all religious succors at a time when most needed; for he had neither baptism, nor confirmation, nor confession, nor Holy Eucharist at this terrible period in which passion awakening in the soul of the young man, affords him the occasion of so grand a triumph, so perfect a victory, if he is able to conquer, but which drags him into such deep degradation if he yields to it. When we consider these causes, the futility of St. Monica's efforts is easily explained, although her labor had been so great. Her work, however, was not lost; let us be certain of it, for what God and a Christian mother together implant in a child does not so easily perish. Even if the wind of passion be powerful enough to dim for an instant the sacred flame of conscience, we may feel a moral certainty that it will not be able to extinguish it altogether.

During all this while, God watched over and guarded with heavenly protection both the mother and son; He consoled her broken heart for the affliction it suffered when she became cognizant of her son's moral condition. This consolation came to her in witnessing the first step of Patricius toward religion and the Church.

During the seventeen years that St. Monica had lived in the matrimonial state with her pagan husband she had suffered much and obtained much merit. During all this space of time she had never ceased for a moment to labor with infinite discretion for his conversion. It was by her admirable tact, Christian patience, and deep devotion that she gained him over to God. She said little; never argued nor preached to him, but prayed much; hence she conquered his violent, rebellious will.

She began to see some glimpses of hope that her pagan husband's heart and soul were touched by God's grace. Time, which is always on the side of those who know how to wait patiently, had come to her aid.

As he advanced in life, and as the furious passions grew more subject to reason, Patricius saw the madness and wickedness of venerating and adoring dumb idols, which were the works of the devil. His heart began to feel the sweet odor of Jesus Christ that issued from the heart of his holy spouse.

For a long while he resisted the calls and the whisperings of divine grace; and vowed within his heart that he would never yield to the influence of the Christian religion. He remained for a long while in a state of hesitancy; sometimes his conscience upbraided him for not acting according to its dictates. He would say, "Not yet awhile; time enough." These thoughts tormented his heart, struggling between virtue and vice. He was particularly anxious to conceal from his wife his doubts, his hesitancy, and almost despair. St. Monica divined the sad condition of his conscience, but said little and prayed much. At length, conquered by the truth, he declared to St. Monica that he had resolved to abjure paganism.

Who can imagine the joy which filled the heart of St. Monica on hearing these good tidings? What a source of happiness it was for her to think her husband had become a Christian just at the time when Augustine, then in his sixteenth year, needed so sorely a most vigilant and efficacious direction. She thanked God with all the powers of her soul, and besought Him with tears to strengthen the resolution taken by Patricius, and to hasten the day when she would have the consolation of seeing him enrolled among the catechumens. The catechumenate was then the novitiate of Christianity. Before being introduced to the latter by holy baptism, at a time when paganism was yet powerful, the adults were stopped for a while at the vestibule of the church to find out if they entered among the catechumens of their own free will; if so, they were then instructed in the great and important duties of religion.

Resolved on becoming a Christian, Patricius betakes himself to the church, and there publicly abjures paganism, and makes a profession of the Christian faith. This occurred, probably, about the year 370, at the commencement of the holy season of Lent. Monica accompanied him, and Augustine followed. Monica wept for joy on witnessing this solemn ceremony, the crowning of all happiness, and a full complement for all her sorrows.

Conducted before the altar, Patricius knelt and bowed down his once haughty head, whilst the bishop imposed hands on him, and implored God to sanctify him and admit him among the number of His children. Then he received the sign of the Cross of Jesus Christ on his forehead, in order that he might go into the

Church by honoring the humiliations of the Saviour. A little blessed salt was put on his lips, the symbol of that incorruptibility of the Christian heart which he should henceforth preserve. From that day forward his name was inscribed or enrolled in the lists of the church, and he took his place among the catechumens. If Patricius, in making this first act of faith, had decided on immediately making the second—that is to say, passing rapidly through all the different degrees of the catechumenate, so as to obtain baptism at the approaching paschal solemnities—nothing could have been wanting to fill the measure of St. Monica's joy and happiness.

But Patricius was not prepared to take this step. There were then clustered around the portals of Christianity vast numbers of men who were no longer pagans, but yet were not Christians, because, although enrolled among the catechumens, they obstinately refused to receive baptism. In vain the Fathers of the Church exhausted their eloquence in endeavoring to show them the folly and the great danger to their souls in delaying holy baptism. In vain, at the approach of the Epiphany and Easter, the Fathers cried out to them with a voice of thunder: "Behold these great days; prepare yourselves for holy baptism. Assume at the baptismal font a Christian name!" Nothing could shake their indifference. Bearing the title of Christians, but refusing to accept and fulfil the duties which Christianity imposed; obliged neither to confess nor receive paschal communion, nor observe any law of the Church, because they were not baptized, disregarding in many cases every check of conscience, under the influence of that fearful maxim: "Let them sin. What does it matter,

since they are not baptized."* They, of course, believed that it was sufficient for them to receive baptism at the hour of death to be purified from their sins and be saved; and they risked the happiness of their future lives and periled their souls' eternal happiness on the chance of obtaining it. The probation of the catechumens was primitively two years, according to the 42d canon of the Council of Elvira, which even adds *si bonæ fuerunt conversationes*, for in contrary cases the trial was prolonged, but in the fourth century the Church labored to curtail its duration. Every age has its temptations, its maladies, and its perils. This was the malady of that age. Vast numbers of men succumbed to it.

Patricius, like many others, was obstinate in ad-

* This abuse was most eloquently and energetically condemned by the Fathers of the Church, and particularly by St. Cyprian (Epist. 26, ad Magn.), by St. Gregory Nazianzen (Orati. II.), by St. John Chrysostom (Homil. 23, super ad Apost.), and others. The Councils threatened with the greatest pains of the Church those who yielded to this abuse. To see how much it had spread, it requires to peruse the great collections of Christian inscriptions we discover from the epitaphs of the catechumens in Boldetti (p. 807), Bosio (p. 433), Mattei (Mus. Veron., p. 480, No. 3), Perret (pl. 6, 16, 53), and others. And these epitaphs make mention of catechumens of all ages. Fortunatus died at the age of thirty-six years a catechumen (Lupi, Dissert., tom. 1st, p. 132), Perpetuus at the age of thirty years (Rosse, I., p. 109), Innocentius died at the age of twenty-three years (Vignoli, Vet. inscript. rel., p. 333), Junius Bassus died at the age of forty-three years (Bosio, p. 45), Stratonica died at the age of fifty-five years (Corsini, Dissert. II., post not. Græc.), and a thousand others. It is worthy of remark that the greater part of these inscriptions are of the fourth century.

hering to this irreligious custom, then prevalent in Africa among the catechumens. The prayers and tears of St. Monica were yet needed to sway the mind of her husband to yield to the sacred rite of baptism. It needed time to bring about this happy effect. Death had almost clutched him before he consented to receive holy baptism and be reconciled to God thereby. Incomplete as this first step was, it was not without joy for our Saint. At least, Patricius was no longer a pagan. He prayed to the true God. He believed in Jesus Christ. And if St. Monica had not the consolation of seeing him kneel beside her at the communion-table, already they went together to the church; they attended the early Masses and instructions; and, after eighteen years of marriage, got a glimpse of that unity of soul and body in which for their common happiness they should have begun. In reading the recital of those ancient scenes one is involuntarily brought back in thought to those that transpire daily under our eyes in this corrupted age, which resembles so closely the fourth century. Who of us, witness of the same ruins, has not assisted at the same resurrections? Who among us has not seen pious, accomplished young ladies giving their hands in marriage to young men void of religion, boasting of their infidelity, indifferent and careless about the future life, if only this goes well with them, and has not heard it said, with much fear, "O God, what is going to happen, what is about to become of them?" Ten years pass away; that young unbeliever, that scoffer at God's institution, His Church, that reviler of things consecrated to God, humbly prays, practices his religion, and adores his Maker.

Oh, the wickedness and depravity of the age in which we live! that it should require so much time for the Christian to open his eyes to the light that shines so luminously. But also great and touching are the blessings of these times. The Church has left it in our power to give by the sacrament of marriage that wayward, indifferent, irreligious young man a young, virtuous wife, who will act as his guardian angel. Ah! let her not forget her beautiful *rôle*. Let her understand that she will have the power of an angel on condition of having patience, fidelity, delicacy, tender and vigilant love, sweet silence, and the habit of prayer. "The *rôle* of Christian women," says a charming writer, "resembles that of the guardian angels. They can direct the world, but only by remaining invisible like them." *

* Ozanam, Complete Works, Vol. II., p. 93.

CHAPTER IV.

RESULT OF THE CRISIS OF HIS PASSIONS—SAINT MONICA IS WARNED OF THE PERILS OF HER SON—GOD, TO CONSOLE HER, PERMITS THAT IN PROPORTION AS AUGUSTINE WITH-DRAWS HIMSELF FROM HER, HER HUSBAND IS ATTRACTED TO HER—CHRISTIAN DEATH OF PATRICIUS.

370—372.

WHAT impression the scenes we have just related made on Augustine we know not. But it is probable they made little or none; for there are times when, says the prophet: *Men have ears and hear not; they have eyes and they see not.* At least it is certain the impression was not deep enough to arrest the progress of his passions.

It is a wonderful fact that at the time when St. Monica began to gain over to herself and God her husband, she should have lost her son. Passion grew cold in the old age of the father, and permitted his return; passion waxed strong in the heart of the son, and carried him from her.

Augustine was more and more consumed by it. One is terrified in reading, in his *Confessions*, pages of burning and eloquent truth, in which, like some great physician who follows step by step the course of a malady, Augustine describes and analyzes the steady progress of the baleful fire raging in his soul; and asks, what is going to become,—not of his virtue,—for that perished long ago,—but of his mind, his heart, his character,

his genius even? For of that fire must be said that which is written in the Book of Job: This fire consumeth everything; it is a fire that devoureth even to destruction, and rooteth up all things that spring. It destroys health, it hardens the heart, it extinguishes the light of genius. The chaste transports of pure love, the radiant visions of a blooming adolescence, the sense of the infinite, the powers of manhood, the sense of genius tempered by sensibility and tenderness, all are lost before being experienced. And who does not know that all destructive forces first attack love, friendship, charity, and pity, and that the heart, that delicate flower, perishes more quickly than genius?*

To save Augustine, a new and more powerful force was needed, since the voice of conscience, the example of his father, the happiness of domestic life, and the sight of his mother's virtue, had been unable to do so. Monica's influence was now to be brought to bear upon him, and for this it was necessary that she should be enlightened concerning her son.

Light came to her from Patricius. There are things which the eye of a father detects more readily than that of a mother. Converted only shortly before from paganism, still thoughtless, and more sensitive to the joy of seeing his son attaining manhood than to the fear of seeing him lose his innocence, he came to Monica one day, in great glee, to confide to her that Augustine had arrived at virility. He smiled, seeing himself in fancy already a grandfather.

But at the first words which escaped him the heart

* Read the chapter on *Les Deux Foyers* in Père Gratry's *Connaissance de l'âme*; or Père Lacordaire's admirable discourse on Chastity.

of Monica was filled with an indefinable emotion. Her repose, her joy, had been the thought that Augustine was still a child. The idea that he had become a man, that his passions would now become active, if indeed they had not already manifested themselves in his heart, and that his innocence would henceforth be in peril, occasioned her mortal anxiety.

“My father,” says St. Augustine, “was yet only a catechumen, and that but a short time.” So we must not be astonished at finding his thoughts not of the most elevated kind. “But my mother was advanced in piety. Thou hadst already begun in her breast Thy temple, and the foundation of Thy holy habitation. She therefore, upon hearing it, was seized with fear and trembling, and experienced a Christian emotion in thinking of the evils which were about to menace me.”

Pious emotion of St. Monica! Noble and all divine in its birth was the uneasiness which could make her forget the pride of a mother in the beauty of her son's maturing youth,—in the fear of danger to his innocence. God be thanked, such anxiety on the part of mothers has not disappeared from our midst. It still lives in the hearts of many Christians.

She sought Augustine, and whether it be that she wrung a confession from him, or that she divined the state of his soul by means of that intuition which is common to all mothers, she commenced to express to him, from that day forth, what she thought of his sad state. Frequently taking him aside, or whilst walking with him, she spoke to him of God, of the faith of his infancy, of the peace of pure hearts, of the malice of evil and the hatred it should inspire us with.

She said all this with the force and in the moving

manner which all mothers seem to possess, especially when their hearts are full of faith and their children in peril, but she spoke a language which Augustine no longer comprehended. Her words entered his ears, but not his soul. And as he did not wish to reply to his mother, he avoided her. The deep, troubled gaze of Monica embarrassed him.

He went out hunting for days together, wandering about alone, a prey to the various emotions which invade the soul at sixteen years of age; entertaining, in turn, the most elevated sentiments, the most enthusiastic dreams, and the most earthly and most shameful thoughts. He resembled a wrecked ship which has become the sport of the winds and floods, and mounts and sinks only in obedience to them. When he was not at the chase, his day was passed with his friends in conversation and sport unworthy of him.

“What is more wicked than theft? In whom is it pardoned? Not even in indigence urged by distress. Well, I have willed to steal, and I have stolen without necessity, without need, through disgust for justice, through plenitude of iniquity. Near my father’s vineyard there was a pear-tree loaded with fruit. We went there, a troop of wicked youths, and despoiled it in the middle of the night, having prolonged our games until that hour according to our detestable habit. We carried off the fruit, not to regale ourselves with it, for we hardly tasted it,—indeed threw it to the swine,—but simply for the pleasure of doing something forbidden.”*

Of these mischievous tricks of boys we should not even have spoken, were it not that this circumstance

* Confessions, Book II., Ch. IV.

furnished an occasion and an impetus to Augustine's talent to rise to the loftiest heights of philosophical disquisition on the depravity of man, who loves evil for evil's sake. These follies of his youth led him to the deepest moral reflections on the danger of wicked companions, for we commit vices in their company which we never would have thought of had we been alone. If we seek the company of the wicked their vices will stick to us like tar. "In the midst of my friends," he says, "they would boast of their wicked exploits and vile deeds; when they gloried in them I thought it a shame to be less corrupted, less wicked than they were, so I threw myself into the whirlpool of vice, not only to find pleasure therein, but also to be lauded by my compeers.

"Is there anything more shameful than vice? And yet by a strange perversion of mind, it was through fear of shame that I committed it. And when I had done nothing to equal their most degrading debaucheries, I feigned to have done something. I did all this not to appear despicable in their eyes, for if I strove to live innocently and chastely, I would have been held, in their estimation, mean and contemptible. Behold the companions with whom I ran through the wicked places of Babylon, and began to roll in the mire of its streets."*

We can easily perceive the increasing grief of St. Monica; yet, not content with confiding her uneasiness to God in fervent prayers, she continued to sound in Augustine's ears holy admonitions and solemn warnings. "Once in particular she took me aside, and I

* Confessions, Book II., Ch. III.

well remember with what solicitude she besought me for my soul's sake to be chaste; and if I had not the courage to keep this beautiful virtue in my heart, at least to respect it in the heart of others. 'And especially,' she added, 'never by my irregularities, to disturb the peace, the honor, and the union of families.'"*

But with what rapidity the passions develop! How soon they become powerful! This attractive young man, who possessed so elevated a mind, so excellent a heart, such a mother whom he loved most deeply and tenderly, hardly has felt their influence, than he no longer heeds his mother; and it must be added, almost regards her with contempt. "In my view," he says, "the words of my mother were only those of a woman, and I would have blushed to permit myself, a young man, to be ruled by a woman. Behold how I despised her, my mother, or rather, O my God, it is Thee that I despised in her."†

On that day, the veil, if it still remained before the eyes of St. Monica, began to lift, and she knew the first great sorrow of a mother. What tears she shed! What admonitions she addressed, and even more energetically than before, to her sinful son! How ardently she prayed that God would save and protect Augustine, whom she no longer knew how to protect!

And yet, twenty-five years after this, Augustine, examining the conduct of his mother under these critical circumstances, after having noted her counsels, her prayers, her tears, her vigilance, concludes that she did not do enough for his salvation. She should have sac

* Confessions, Book II., Ch. III.

† Ibid.

rificed everything, even his future, to this consideration. "My mother," he says, "was very careful to advise me to be chaste; but she should have done more after what my father said to her of me, to restrain the bad propensities of which she foresaw the violence. She should have saved me at any price, were it only by marrying me at once at Thagaste. She recoiled before this remedy, lest by using it my future should be destroyed; not my eternal future, for which my pious mother trusted in God, but my literary future, for which Patricius and Monica were both too anxious; he, because forgetful of Thee, O my God, he dreamed of the vanities of the world; she, because far from believing that my studies were hurtful to me, regarded them as a ladder which should raise me to Thee. In the meantime, instead of my being guided with a wise severity, the reins were left loose, and I permitted my passions, unchecked, to carry me whither they would."*

Behold what Augustine has said of his mother; and because she was content to weep and bemoan this first appearance of evil in her son, he adds: "She walked slowly yet along the road of virtue."† And what shall we say, O God, in view of Christians who act so feebly in regard to their children, who close their eyes to the latter's disorders, excuse their vices so easily, and never seem to comprehend that the first duty of mothers, after having created the consciences of their children, is to protect, to defend, and at any price to save them.

The money necessary for the continuation of Augustine's studies had at length been gathered together

* Confessions, Book II., Ch. III.

† Ibid.

and Patricius urged his departure. Monica was a prey to dreadful anxiety. On one side, she saw the necessity of Augustine's being removed from the indolent and monotonous life of Thagaste; on the other, the danger of sending him so far away, and to so corrupt a city as Carthage. She was forced, however, to yield to Patricius' decree; and endeavoring to assure herself that his deep studies would distract Augustine from his evil tendencies, she conducted him to Carthage, toward the end of the year 370, when the schools reopened after vacation. History is silent as to her manner of parting with Augustine, and her moving counsels and tender exhortations to him to remain pure, to preserve his faith; as to all the emotions, in short, which she must have experienced at parting with her son, and under such circumstances; but the scene can be easily imagined.

Carthage had been rebuilt at the most brilliant period of Roman civilization, and its luxury and great riches combined to make it one of the first cities of the empire. It ceded neither to Antioch nor Alexandria. Younger than either of these, it had an aspect of newness which rendered it less attractive to the select, but more so to the crowd. It possessed a fine harbor, recently constructed by Augustus; long, straight, sunny streets, adorned with fountains, and filled with people. One of the streets, called the Celestial Street, was lined with temples. Another, the Street of the Bankers, fairly shone with marble and gold. Further on were manufactories of precious stuffs; fruit, wheat, and cattle markets, and money exchanges; all that was incidental, in short, to the life of a vast merchant city, in which had revived and was living again the old Carthaginian spirit.

But in the midst of this busy existence, letters had a place. Latin, not Greek, in their instinct and taste, looking to the West rather than to the East for inspiration, they were as susceptible to every intellectual movement in Rome, as Antioch, and especially Alexandria had been to the intellectual manifestations of Greece.

The schools, recognizable by the long white curtains which depended from their doors, were numerous and celebrated; grammar, eloquence, and philosophy were taught in them. All the African youth came thither. These students were intelligent, but frivolous, dissolute, and so fickle that no reliance could be placed upon them; to-day applauding a professor, and to-morrow causing a riot in his class, and breaking everything to pieces, if he were unfortunate enough to excite their anger or their ridicule. Those of the students who gave the tone to all the others, the most licentious and elegant, had adopted or received a sobriquet, in which they gloried—they were called *Eversores*, which signifies, *Reversers* or *Brawlers*.

To this taste for letters, Carthage united that for art. Within her theatres the masterpieces of Greek art, and the finest works of Roman dramatic art were interpreted. But she did not pause at the representations of the plays of Euripides, Sophocles, Terence, and Plautus. She added the games of the circus, the combats between animals and gladiators; and such was the avidity of the people for this kind of spectacle, and the wagers laid by the students during the struggle were so heavy, that the exhibition usually terminated with insults, blows, and often a riot. One can readily perceive from this brief description what the morals of

such a city must have been. It is sufficient to say that in this regard, Carthage rivalled Rome herself.

Picture a young man of seventeen years, gifted with a vivid imagination, and already consumed with thoughts of passion, entering such a city. Until now, he had seen only in a dream the enchanted cup from which at this age we imagine we can quaff happiness. He now decided to drink it quickly and to the dregs. What had been the perils of Madaura compared to those of Carthage?

His appearance at the schools made a great sensation. He was already master of many languages; he had singular aptitude for the studies of philosophy and metaphysics. He had an insatiable thirst for study; a taste for poetry, the arts and sciences, and was the possessor of great natural eloquence. He astonished his fellow-students and even his professors. Everybody predicted that within a few years he would become the glory of the Carthaginian bar. What added a singular charm to his personality was, that in the midst of his success he remained timid and reserved. He had no desire to make himself conspicuous. He wore in his countenance, which became daily more beautiful, an expression of candor, a quality peculiar to superior minds, and which is both the sign and the companion of true talent.

It was thus he appeared to men; but he declares to us in his humility, that interiorly he was far different. He dreamed of glory, and fixed an ambitious gaze on the bar, and under that modest appearance which he always wore and which was quite natural to him, he concealed a soul intoxicated with love of success. "I held," he says, "the first rank in the schools of rhetoric,

an honor that filled me with supreme joy, and inflated my vanity. Thou knowest, however, O my God," he adds, "that I was more retiring and modest than my companions—that I was far removed from the folly of those called disturbers; I experienced even a sort of shameful shame in not being able to resemble them, and though I may have lived among them and enjoyed their society, I abhorred their actions, the insulting tricks which they perpetrated on new-comers and strangers, whose embarrassment always afforded occasion for their malicious mirth. Behold with what kind of men I studied eloquence, out of that wicked and damnable end of ambition that finds its stimulus in vanity." But, great as were both his vanity and ambition, they were the least of the evils which afflicted Augustine. To that first ebullition of passion which had displayed itself so violently and terribly at Thagaste had succeeded a vague restlessness perhaps more terrible. His soul, void of God, longed for something to satisfy its cravings, but knew not where to find it. An indefinable disquietude tormented him. Burning with vague desires without object and without limit, he arrived at that perilous moment which ordinarily precedes great falls, and which too often announces them.

"I loved not yet," he says, "but I wished to be loved; and fired by this desire, I sought an object for my passion. I wandered through the city to find it, and the places where I did not expect to find it were odious to me." He adds these words of wonderful depth of wisdom: "There was a famine within me of that superior food, which is none other than Thyself, O my God, and yet that famine did not cause hunger

within me, for I was without any appetite; incorruptible aliments which my soul needed, it had no appetite for. I was disgusted, not through satiety, but through indigence. And my soul, sick, covered with ulcers, fainting with inanition, fell far from Thee, and begged of the creature something to heal its wounds. I wished to love and be loved, and with an affection that should be without reserve.”*

Augustine was poor and unknown in a great city; but young, agreeable, elegant, and distinguished. It was, therefore, only too easy for him to fall into the snare in which he desired to be caught.

The theatrical representations which from the very moment of his arrival in Carthage Augustine frequented with the pleasure which he had always experienced for this kind of diversion, helped to thrust him into the abyss. His ardent imagination, and the exquisite sensibility which made him shed tears at the recital of a sacrifice inspired by love, invested the theatre with a peculiar charm.

“These representations delighted me, filled as they were with prototypes of my own misery, and fuel for the flame that was consuming me.”

He became so enamored of the charms of the theatre, so moved by the sacrifices he had seen depicted within it, that he sought only an opportunity to awaken affection within some heart in order to receive the same love, and offer the same devotion.

Alas! he prosecuted this quest even in the church; for during these early days he still went to church, assisting at the holy ceremonies, but only in body, for

* Confessions, Book III., Ch. II.

he brought thither a mind filled with passion, and eyes that were busy in seeking the object of his desires. We can not exactly state what transpired one day within the church, and what punishment God inflicted upon him, for his utterances on the subject are very brief and vague. "I also dared in the celebration of Thy solemnities and within Thy temple, to conceive and nourish an evil thought which could produce only fruits of death. Thou didst chastise me severely for it, O my God, but not in proportion to my crime; so great art Thou in mercy, Thou, my God, my refuge against those wicked ones with whom I wandered about with an outstretched neck, a runaway from Thee, loving my own and not Thine, in love with a fugitive liberty."

Some authors have believed that it was here at the foot of the altar, on a great feast-day, that Augustine met with what he had desired for so long a time. However that may be, the sad fall was not long delayed. "I fell," he says, "into the snare in which I desired to be taken. O my God, what gall Thy goodness mingled with this sweetness. I loved; I was loved; and I pleased myself with being fettered with those wretched chains. I experienced the jealousy, the suspicions, the fears, the anger, and the tempests of love."

Who was this woman who, forgetting God for Augustine—as Augustine forgot God for her,—held his heart captive for fifteen years; who accompanied him over land and sea, to Thagaste, to Carthage, to Rome, to Milan, and parted with him in anguish at the time of his conversion, to pass the remainder of her life in a convent? We are utterly ignorant. With a delicate reserve Augustine has withheld her name, and she passes like a veiled figure through this history. He con-

cealed her name also from his mother, as indeed he did the whole unhappy connection, which no prayers or tears of St. Monica could have induced him to break off. But soon the wretched secret had to be confessed; for, in 372, a son was born to him, the brilliant Adeodatus, him whom in later days Augustine only presumed to designate as the son of his sin; but whom, in the first flush of his unhallowed happiness, he named Adeodatus,—Gift of God. “Such was then my life, O my God,” he cries, “if life it can be called.”

When Monica learned of the disorders of her son she was so deeply affected that it was feared she would succumb. Her tears fell by day and by night. She could not even restrain them in public. There were days when the place which she had occupied during mass and at prayer were found, after she had quitted them, to be literally bathed in tears. The Church has instituted, on the 4th of May, a feast in honor of St. Monica, which might be called the Feast of the Tears of a Christian Mother. See in what manner and with what tone they are celebrated :

Anthem 1st. This holy mother wept and prayed incessantly for the conversion of her son Augustine.

Anthem 2d. O, happy mother, who must one day be hearkened to according to the fervor of your desire. In the meantime she weeps day and night, and she prays ardently for her son.

Anthem 3d. Behold her, this widow who knows how to weep; she who sheds such constant and bitter tears for her son.

Anthem 4th. They have raised their voices, Lord; they have cried aloud; these floods of tears which fall from the eyes of this holy mother.

Anthem 5th. She weeps without measure, this inconsolable mother.

All the office of the feast continues in this tone, and reveals to us, in this admirable mother, what every detail of her life confirms, a sorrow of which there is no like example in the history of the Church.

One human consolation sustained her in her grief, and that was that she did not weep alone. Patricius now shared her belief and her sorrow. He had returned, slowly it is true, for he had to come from a great distance, but nevertheless certainly, to truth and virtue. The Church declares in the beautiful progress of her liturgy, and St. Augustine affirms, that this conversion was due, as was his own, to the prayers and tears of St. Monica. It was due also, as we have already shown, to the charm and heavenly attraction of her virtue, which augmented every day; to her patience, sweetness, and devotion; to the humble, constant, and chaste tenderness with which she always responded to his coldness; to the perfume of her piety which rose toward heaven; and to the self-immolation unceasingly offered up by her for the conversion of her husband. All this had united to form around Patricius an atmosphere, which he had unconsciously breathed, and so imbibed the faith. When goodness, beauty, and truth are thus incarnated in a human creature they exert so powerful a fascination that one can not resist them. It is necessary to flee or succumb.

Happily, Patricius succumbed. His life had modified, year by year, until a total change had been wrought. The sacrament of baptism which he himself proposed to receive, acting in advance, taught him

the value of purity and the beauty of sweetness. He began to repent of the past, and apply himself to making Monica forget the cruel pangs he himself had caused her.

It is the happy privilege of the human heart, no matter how sad may have been its existence, to forget all its sorrows at the first dawn of love. This dawn now gleamed in St. Monica's heart. After seventeen years of marriage, these two souls were united in the delicate and exalted affection which has been so well described by a great writer of this century: "When one has served to a poor creature as an instrument of the light which reveals to him his fall, and gives him back his greatness of soul, this sublime rescue from a death which would have been eternal, sometimes inspires in both souls an indefinable mutual attraction, born of happiness given and happiness received."*

Patricius and Monica experienced before parting this noble attraction, and the tenderness of the one for the poor saved soul, and the gratitude of the other to the sweet, strong heart that had so labored to draw him from evil, united to form, on the borders of the tomb, one of those attachments for which there is no name on the earth.

We are ignorant of the circumstances of Patricius' death. Toward 371 he fell sick, and comprehending that his end was approaching, he asked for and received baptism with great fervor, after which he peacefully passed away, assisted in his last moments by the angel whom God had given him for a spouse. Her work of seventeen years had accomplished much. When Patri-

* Lacordaire, "St. Madeleine."

cius had wedded Monica, the nobility, generosity, uprightness, and even delicacy of his nature were buried in depths which hid them from all human knowledge, even his own; pride, anger, religious indifference, and passion reigned sovereign masters in his heart. And little by little all had changed. His evil qualities had descended to the depths of his soul once more, and his good and noble qualities reappeared at the surface. Light ended by triumphing over all, and, at the moment of his death, beamed from his last happy and grateful look. Monica assisted at this scene, weeping with joy and sorrow. She remembered no longer his harshness nor his weaknesses; she mourned for losing him just at the moment in which she had begun to enjoy his affection, and rejoiced at the thought of being able to look forward to meeting him hereafter. In preparing his tomb she had a place reserved for herself, that she might rest beside him whose soul she had resuscitated.*

So God consoled her and permitted her not to succumb to the sorrow which the unhappy entanglement of her son caused. For each step that Augustine had made in evil, Patricius had made a corresponding one in good. When Augustine commenced to wander from God, to frequent theatres, and add fuel to the baleful fire lighted within his heart, Patricius took the step of enrolling himself among the catechumens. When Augustine, despising the counsels, the prayers, and the tears of his mother, formed a guilty attachment, and dishonored his youth by a shameful paternity, Patricius asked for baptism, and renewing his life in the regener-

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XI.

ating waters, died a Christian. And so it is throughout St. Monica's life. Ever by the side of a sorrow appears a consolation. God so ordained it, because her sorrows were so great that the strength of her faith alone prevented them from being unbearable, and because it was on account of her limitless love for God that she wept so bitterly for Augustine.

CHAPTER V.

ST. MONICA AS A WIDOW—SHE SUFFERS THE GREATEST SACRIFICES IN ORDER TO COMPLETE THE EDUCATION OF AUGUSTINE—ROMANIEN COMES TO HER AID—IN THE MIDST OF HER GREAT SORROW SHE BEHOLDS, WITH A GLEAM OF HOPE, THE EFFORTS OF AUGUSTINE TO FIND TRUTH AGAIN.

372—375.

THE first work of St. Monica was finished. It had taken seventeen years to accomplish it, for although the whole chronology of this history is enveloped in obscurity, all concur in placing the death of Patricius in 371, when Monica was thirty-nine years of age.

The fact may here be remarked, which has been borne in upon us during the course of our hagiographical studies, that nearly all the great saints have survived their husbands: St. Monica, St. Paula, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Hedwige, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Blessed Mary of the Incarnation, and a number of others. They entered the state of marriage, but only passed through it. They tasted its joys for an instant, that they might teach the world to taste them holily; but presently God rooted up all things about them that they might cling to, as if He were jealous, and wished such hearts to be occupied only by Himself. And perhaps He did so, too, in order to give such great souls, with the great sorrows they were deemed worthy to bear, the facility of attaining to that sublime virtue

which the marriage state but rarely affords the liberty to do.

It would even appear in some cases that the happier they are, the earlier they are destined to become widows. St. Elizabeth was but twenty years of age ; St. Hedwige, twenty-three ; St. Jane de Chantal, twenty-nine, when God deprived them of the pure joys of conjugal happiness. It is true St. Monica was almost forty years of age when she suffered this bereavement. But this was because she had not to wait until then to receive her crown of thorns. From the hour of her marriage she had known nothing but sorrow.

Nevertheless, Patricius had hardly been taken from her when she made distinct progress in virtue. The beautiful aspirations of her soul, which her married life had been so adapted to stifle, grew strong in the atmosphere of her widowhood, and led her rapidly to the most heroic virtue.

We are ignorant as to whether or not she received at the hands of the Bishop of Thagaste the blessed veil, and vidual habit with which the Church clothed all women who engaged to persevere in widowhood until death ; and then intrusted them with several important ministries.* Perhaps the desire of Monica to keep

* In the first days of Christianity the primitive Church took great care to transform widowhood into a sort of consecration to God. St. Jerome calls this state the second degree of chastity (Epist. 26), and long before his time the order of consecration was formulated. This took place, not in the church, but in the secretarium or sacristy. Thenceforth the widow belonged to the Church, which was bound to provide for her sustenance. In the titles of certain Christian women, it is noted that they were no charge to the Church ; Ecclesiam nun-

herself free to go to the assistance of Augustine, who needed her so much, prevented her from making this consecration of herself, but it is quite certain that, actuated by a touching fidelity to her husband's memory, she vowed in her own heart to accept no other mortal spouse, but pass the rest of her life in the sole service of God. It is St. Augustine who paints the portrait of his mother as she appeared at this time. "Thou knowest, O my God, what my mother was,—a chaste and sober widow, full of charity for the poor, and rendering all kinds of homage and service to Thy saints; never omitting a single day the oblation at Thy altar; and so assiduous in attending church that morning and evening she remained there for hours, in silence, recollection, and prayer; occupied, not in gaining the news of the day, but in conversing with Thee, O God, and listening to Thee."

Here we see one of the widows of whom Bossuet

quam, or nihil gravavit (Marchi., Monum., delle, art. Christ., p. 98).

They were employed in certain apostolic ministrations, visiting the sick, and instructing the catechumens, etc., etc. Thus we find on their epitaphs this formula, surprising to those not familiar with the discipline of the primitive Church—*vidua sedit*. She sat or ruled in quality of her widowhood twenty, thirty years, etc., etc. *Veneriginæ matri viduæ quæ sedit vidua annos 60* (Marini, *Iscriz.*, Alban., p. 195). We read also, on a fragment of stone, in Boldetti (page 452), *vidua sedit*. This expression alludes to the chair or cathedra, in which widows sat teaching, and no doubt many of those seen in the Catacombs were reserved for their use. (See Martini, Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, in French). But at St. Monica's time this custom of widows had almost disappeared; it was replaced by the practice of good works outside, which the bishop recommended to the widow in blessing the vidual habit.

speaks, who, truly widowed and desolate, bury themselves, so to speak, in the tombs of their husbands, by entombing there all human love with those cherished ashes, and forsaken on the earth, concentrate their hearts on Jesus Christ as their new spouse.*

To this mourning, which lasted through all her life, and which is singularly touching when we consider all that Patricius had made her suffer, she added the mourning of the mother who sees her son's soul perishing, and can do nothing save pray and offer self-sacrifice for its salvation. And so that her prayers and tears might gain a strength proportionate to Augustine's needs, she lived in solitude, and vowed herself more completely than ever to silence and a hidden life; the assuagement of the woes of the poor, and above all, to the pure and generous love of God.

She had never desired the things of this world, and even in her youth had thoroughly despised its vanities. But now she renounced them utterly, and began to clothe herself with that severe simplicity which distinguishes those of whom St. Paul says, that they are widows indeed. She practiced the most severe mortification. Her fasts were so frequent and so rigorous that in this regard, and at a time when bodily mortification was most courageously practiced, she had not an equal. When it happened that she was not fasting, as on feast-days, for example, she sat sighing at table, and touched food only as others touch a bitter beverage. Her constant thoughts, the errors of her son, and the sorrows of Jesus Christ, did not permit her a single pleasure at table. Her conversation was sweet, innocent, humble,

* Bossuet, Oraison funèbre de la Princesse Palatine, and Letters of Piety and Direction. Letter LXXXIII.

candid, and full of Jesus Christ. Long after her death, none could recall a single word which was not suggestive of faith.

She had always loved the poor tenderly. Indeed, it may be said that this was the first passion of her life. From her earliest youth, her greatest happiness had been to welcome poor wayfarers, and wash their feet, or to seek the poor in their homes, and serve the sick among them. The sad union which she had contracted had forced her to suppress this love without destroying it; rather augmenting it, as any torrent is augmented whose source remains, but whose course is barred. And now that widowhood had removed the barrier to expression of her love for God's poor, like a very torrent it overflowed all bounds. She was no longer satisfied with feeding the poor; her love craved to tend them. She dressed their most dreadful sores with oil, kissed them with respect, and bathed them with her tears. The poor were ravished with her tenderness. They no longer satisfied themselves with calling her mother; they termed her their servant. The first expressed only her tenderness and her charity; the other was a revelation of the depths to which her heroic love and deep humility had made her descend.*

Adam St. Victor, in his hymn on St. Monica, declares:

* "The Bolandists, 4 Maii, say of her, that she was not only the mother of the poor, but the servant; for indeed whilst her husband lived she was not mistress of her own actions, and so she could not largely distribute her charities. But afterward she so lived that she not only distributed freely and munificently her means to the poor, but she soothed and dressed their sores."

“ Hæc egenis ministravit
 Et en eis Christum pavit,
 Mater dicta pauperum ;
 Curam gerans infirmorum,
 Lavit, stravit, et eorum
 Tersit sordes vulnerum.”

Her deepest happiness was in serving the sick at home and in the hospital. For the astonished Roman empire had seen hospitals organized in its midst;* and while waiting for the Church to people them with its countless phalanges of Sisters of Charity, a creation still more marvellous than even that of the hospitals, the work within them, was left to be performed by pious women, and became peculiarly the portion of widows. By day and by night some of these holy women remained within the hospital walls, so that the sick were never left alone. St. Monica was one of the most fervent and most assiduous in this good work; and she passed long hours by the bedsides of the infirm, happy in being able to serve Jesus Christ in the persons of the poor.

To this great and meritorious work she joined an-

*These hospitals (Nosocomia) sprang up under Constantine, because up to that time the Church, curbed in her movements, took care of the sick at their own houses only through deaconesses, taken or selected from the different districts of the city, and widows consecrated to God. These hospitals were not like the hospitals of our day,—vast edifices presenting a character of unity, but an assemblage of small houses independent of one another, called *domunculæ*, constructed in such a way that each sick person had a separate cell. (Procope, *De Ædif*, Justinian, tome I., ch. 11; *History Byzant.*, tome III.; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orat.* III. See the new and excellent “*Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*,” by M. Abbe Martini.)

other, which at that time was even more needed,—this was the burial of the dead. The Church was earnestly striving to create a tender and delicate respect for the bodies of the dead, and nothing contributed so much to do this as the spectacle of noble and elegant patrician ladies living in the world, washing with their own hands the bodies of the poor, even slaves; enveloping them in folds of aromatic linen, and sometimes clothing them for burial in their own rich garments.* St. Monica followed these great examples. When she had tended and loved a poor person till his death, she relinquished to none the honor of preparing his body for the tomb, but washed it and clothed it with the winding-sheet. Not having been able to render this duty to Jesus Christ in person, she experienced the deepest possible satisfaction in being able to render it to one of His poor servants. Afterward she accompanied it to the cemetery, and offered prayers for the soul of the departed.†

Another work, to which she devoted herself with all her accustomed zeal and devotion, was the care of young orphans, who ran the risk of losing the faith by losing the mother who would have taught it to them at her knee. She endeavored to supply this loss by bringing them up as her own children, sometimes receiving them into her house and nourishing them at her own table. In this we see the promptings of the mother's afflicted heart. She gains these children for God, that God may give her Augustine in return. She awakens love, faith,

* August., *De Civit. Dei*, Book XII., Chap. XIII.; Lactant., *Inst. Divin.*, Book VI.; Tertull., *Apolog.*, XLII.; Euseb., *Hist. Eccles.*, VII., XVI.

† Bollandists, 4 Maii,

and conscience in the hearts of these children in order to obtain from God the preservation of faith, and the awakening of conscience, virtue, and divine love in the heart of her son.*

But the most beautiful of all her works, the most useful and the most delicate,—that which appealed peculiarly to her heart, and for which God had divinely prepared her,—was that of consoling widows and married women.† Alas! They always console the first; but who dreams of consoling the second? And who can do so? No wounds are more painful; none are more secret. With a mortal sorrow in their hearts these women are compelled to wear a smile on their lips. How many are the firesides where love has ceased to show itself! How many are there from whence it has utterly departed, leaving indifference, neglect, and even abandonment to take its place! How many souls, whose fate the careless world envies, are in such case as this! St. Monica knew all this by experience, and she brought to this work sweetness, exquisite delicacy, and a profound and luminous mind. Her success was marvellous.

Such were some of the works of charity which made up her life; and whenever she grew fatigued in performing them—for if fatigue pursues pleasure, why not piety?—she hastened to refresh herself and gain new strength in the living and inexhaustible source of love and sacrifice, our Lord Jesus Christ present on the holy altar.

Whoever had entered the church at Thagaste, morning

* Bollandists, 4 Maii.

† Viduas et Maritates Consolari Boll. 4 Maii.

or evening, at this period, would have beheld St. Monica kneeling, probably in the same obscure corner which she had loved so much in her childhood, and wearing on her beautiful, tear-worn face an expression of deep faith and intense love of God. She never missed the hours of public service at the church, and visited it twice a day besides, to spend long hours in prayer at each visit. During this time of her life she read the Holy Scriptures continually, and especially the Psalms, which she watered with her tears.

She possessed great devotion to the saints, and especially to the martyrs. She went frequently on pilgrimages to their tombs, or to places which had been made celebrated by some of their heroic actions. The days of their feasts she offered at their altars, according to the custom of the time, small baskets containing bread, wine, and meats. These she placed on their tomb, and after having tasted a little of each, in signification of her desire to participate in their virtues and merits, she proceeded to distribute them to the poor. She was very careful in doing this not to pander to the abuses which had already begun to dishonor this old and beautiful custom, and which finally led to its discontinuance.

“When she brought to the tomb of the martyrs,” says St. Augustine, “her basket filled with funeral offerings, she tasted a little of their contents, then distributed the rest, reserving only a few drops of wine, tempered with water, for her sober palate to take a little taste thereof. If more than one pious anniversary was celebrated on the same day, the one cup of wine served her for all, which, being now not only much diluted with water but hot with carriage, was by small sippings

divided between her and her friends, for she satisfied her piety and not her pleasure.”*

Every morning she assisted at the sacrifice of the Mass, at which she communicated, with deep piety and tender fervor. God filled her with the most privileged graces. She had the gift of tears. Often she was rapt in ecstasy, especially on the days when the Church celebrated the remembrance of the great anniversaries of our salvation. But, among all the mysteries, that which had the power of elevating her soul most, and giving it feelings of tender compunction, was the mystery of the passion of our Lord. Her heart could hardly sustain the thought of our Lord on the Cross.†

One day in particular, she was contemplating, in the church, the mystery of the Redemption, and as she endeavored to fathom the greatness and the immensity of the benefits that flow from the Saviour's passion, God so filled her soul with grace and love and heavenly light that she felt a flood of tears welling up to her eyes, and becoming faint and weak, she attempted to hide this outpouring of God's mercy by hastily leaving the church. But she had not time to escape. Her tears flowed so copiously down her pale and wan cheeks that the people gathered around to console her, thinking that her torrents of tears had their source in grief. But what were creatures in such a moment?

Her heart had received one of those deep wounds God sometimes deigns to inflict on souls worthy to receive them, and her tears henceforth never ceased to

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. II.

† Boll., 4 Maii.

flow.* This is the only fact of this kind which has escaped oblivion in regard to St. Monica. But what a vast horizon it opens up! What virtue it reveals! What union with God it indicates!

And what deep regret it inspires for not being able to contemplate in detail a life that must have been so beautiful! We shall frequently experience this regret during the course of this narrative. We are unable to follow her life of prayer, or trace the detail of her mortifications and her penances, which must have been preterhuman during the days of Augustine's wanderings in error. We know nothing of her examples of detachment from the world and self-abnegation; of the virtues of her family life, and proofs of heroic charity. It would appear as if God wished to conceal her from human knowledge in all other phases of her life; as the daughter, the spouse, the servant of the poor, the contemplative; and let her be known only as the mother.

The death of Patricius had been a great blow, for many reasons. He was not rich, and only by exercising the greatest deprivation, had he collected a fund sufficient for the education of Augustine. But he had exhausted all his resources, and his death left St. Monica in a position of much pecuniary embarrassment. To be sure, all that she craved for herself was self-sacrifice. She desired to vow herself to poverty, and the poverty which is not chosen is better in the eyes of the saints than the other; but Monica was a mother, and the privations which she accepted herself, she did not desire for her children. And then, she realized

* Boll., 4 Maii.

what a misfortune it would be for Augustine to have to interrupt his brilliant career, imperil his future, and return to have his mind gradually destroyed in the lazy, monotonous, and empty life of Thagaste. And to avert this misfortune, she resolved to make any sacrifice, however hard.

Augustine was now realizing, or rather surpassing the most sanguine hopes of his brilliant boyhood. The success which had attended his studies in literature, grew pale when compared to that which crowned his philosophical studies. It began to be comprehended that his special gift was, neither his eloquence—admirable as it was, nor his sensibility, though exquisite, nor even his fine and brilliant wit. Beyond and above these qualities of mind which had manifested themselves first, he possessed a sovereign talent which eclipsed them all; and in 372, at precisely the same period in which Monica was suffering such mental anxiety in regard to the carrying on of his studies, Augustine's gift began to reveal itself with a marvelous brilliance.

Whilst he was still occupied with his studies of literature, Augustine heard his Professor of Rhetoric often speak of Aristotle's "Categories," as a book of such depth, that it could only be read with the aid of the most able masters; and by means of figures traced in the sand, to demonstrate to the eyes its metaphysical obscurities. Too impatient to learn what he considered to be so extraordinary, to await the time at which it would have been explained to him, he procured the book, and began to study it himself. To his utter astonishment, he found not the least difficulty in understanding it. He easily mastered the most difficult

problems, and when later he followed the public explanations, he gathered nothing from them that he had not previously acquired by himself. He read, without any assistance, and without difficulty, the books of dialectics, geometry, arithmetic, and music.

He only began to perceive difficulties when he attempted to explain the *Categories* to others, for he was astonished at the trouble which the most intelligent people seemed to have in comprehending them; there was only a small number of intellects which were able to follow him, even at a distance.

Although he was but nineteen years of age at this time, it was evident that he would one day possess the eagle's limpid regard and strong sight, for which no light is too dazzling and no mountain top too high.

Along with the genius of Augustine, his character and disposition became more distinctly revealed. The rebelliousness and caprice of his youth had given place to a charming sweetness of manner. He grew more and more reserved and modest in his demeanor; he avoided the mad reunions of his fellow-pupils; he strove to be dignified, esteemed honor deeply, and attached himself forever to those who conferred benefits on him. He possessed a heart equal to his great mind, and the inexhaustible source of the deepest tenderness.

And now a word as to his physiognomy, the exterior form which clothed this great soul: Augustine was of about medium height; his temperament was delicate and nervous, as is frequently the case with men intellectually great—a fact which St. Gregory of Nazianzen remarks; he had fine, transparent skin; the expression of his face was keen and penetrating, but calm, and expressive of sensibility and tenderness. His

weak voice, delicate throat, narrow and inflammable chest, indicated that he was intended to think rather than to proclaim; to persuade, rather than to rule; to utter sweet, affectionate, influencing words in a circle of chosen friends, rather than to move great assemblies with his eloquence. His whole appearance, in short, was characterized by the most perfect elegance and distinction.

Had Monica been a worldly woman, her son's gifts would have filled her heart with pride; but as it was, she looked beneath this beautiful exterior, and saw the horrible ravages of evil, a wound growing deeper each day, an immortal soul, and that the soul of her cherished son, tending toward destruction. And from her point of view, all his success seemed vain and worthless. And what helped to depress her was the fact, that along with virtue, faith itself had perished in the heart of Augustine. From the heart, which is always its birthplace, the darkness of error had passed into his mind.

From one abyss he had already descended into a deeper; the loss of the faith followed close on the loss of purity. "Alas," he exclaims, "what did it profit me that I mastered all the sciences and understood alone, without the aid of any person, the most obscure and difficult books, so long as I was plunged into such horrible excesses, and into so shameful an indifference to the things of piety? And were not the simple and the lowly happier, since they did not stray far from, but remained in the bosom of Thy holy Church, and there awaited in peace for the wings of charity to advance to their due perfection by the aliment of sound faith?"

Monica followed the progress of this awful malady with fear, but without being discouraged. She had faith in God, and trust in the great heart and profound intellect of Augustine. Indeed, so greatly did she depend upon science to lead him back to God, that rather than have his studies interrupted, she resolved to suffer every privation possible in order to keep him at Carthage. But, alas! what resources can the privations of a woman procure!

Monica was bearing this anxiety, only one of her many, in silence and patience, when a friend of Patricius, and one of the principal citizens of Thagaste, Romanianus—a man whose name deserves to be preserved to the most remote posterity, by the gratitude of the Church and all mankind—divined the perplexity of Monica, and came to her to offer with infinite delicacy and tact, his aid in defraying the expenses of Augustine's education.

It is probable that Romanianus was rich. But he was even more fortunate in the possession of the nobility, generosity, and delicacy of heart, which served a lively and beautiful intelligence. He divined the genius of Augustine, and to enable him to continue his studies with the least possible expense, offered Monica the loan of his house in Carthage for Augustine to reside in.

It is well to bind such hearts as Augustine's with the ties of gratitude. Throughout his life, the cry of gratitude is prolonged. "Oh, Romanianus," he exclaims, "ought I not to thank thee? Was it not thee who, when I went, young and poor, to pursue my studies in a distant city, offered me thy house, thy purse, and more, thy heart? And when I had the misfortune to

lose my father, was it not thee who consoled me by thy friendship, sustained me by thy counsels, aided me by thy fortune? Yes, at Thagaste, our little town, thou didst shed a beginning of glory upon me by honoring me publicly with thy friendship, and offering me the half of thy house."

St. Monica was even more touched than Augustine, by this delicate generosity. She preserved an eternal gratitude for it; and when Romanianus had a son, Licentius, Monica watched over the brilliant, frivolous, and perilous youth of the boy with the tenderest affection and most zealous vigilance. It was evident that she desired to prove a mother to Licentius, to thank Romanianus for having taken a father's place in regard to Augustine.

Assisted by this timely generosity, and freed from the perpetual importunity of passion which had found gratification in his criminal attachment,—recalled, perhaps, to more elevated thoughts by the emotions which the death of Patricius excited,—for, although bound by the chains of evil, it would have been difficult for such a mind and heart as Augustine's to altogether resist the lessons of virtue and immortality which the grave of a father teaches,—Augustine went on with the studies in which his mother never ceased to urge him.

This great woman seems to have always had a presentiment that the return of her son to God would be commenced by science, and held the conviction that whatever elevates the soul of man brings him nearer to God. She was too discreet to place in Augustine's hands the Holy Scriptures, knowing that his passionate heart would have no relish for them. Neither did she

make the mistake of offering the works of the Christian Apologists to one whose faith had grown too feeble to comprehend them; but incited him to the study of antique philosophy, urging as a pretext the necessity of polishing his style, but really in order that his intellect should find no repose.

The exhortations of his mother, the developing of his genius, and the course of his studies, which now led him among the great monuments which mark the pathway of thought in the early ages of the world's history, combined to place in Augustine's hands at this epoch,—about 373,—the Hortensius of Cicero. In this book the great orator explains and discusses all the systems of philosophy, employing all the force of his acute reason to defeat the Sophists who had compromised true philosophy by their subtleties, or dishonored it by making it a trade. He adopted the traditions of Plato and Socrates, and demonstrated their noble and beautiful philosophy, which raises the soul to God and disentangles it from the things of earth, and of which Socrates spoke so admirably when he said, "To reason is to learn how to die," in pages of the greatest eloquence and wisdom. Cicero must be reckoned among the three or four men who have spoken the best in this world,—that is to say, who have best expressed the sentiments of their great souls in language,—for eloquence is nothing else than the form in which the soul manifests its appreciation of the good and the beautiful. This form is often so beautiful and splendid that ordinary minds pause to admire it, and forget to seek the noble, beautiful, and harmonious soul within.

But it was by this that Augustine was fascinated. His thoughts, which had been creeping upon the earth,

now became elevated. He despised the world, fortune, ambition, success, glory, and commenced to turn all the thoughts of his heart toward God. "That book," he says, "renewed my soul. My prayers, my longings, and most profound expectations took an entirely new direction. The world appeared to me worthless. I burned with an incredible love and ardent passion for this immortal Wisdom, and I rose up to return to Thee, O my God."

If Augustine had been subjected to this influence a little earlier, who can tell what might have happened? He would perhaps have been aroused from the torpor which was invading his heart and brought in the way of truth and light; but in 373, the morrow after his sad fall, his soul was no longer free, and had lost much of its susceptibility to good influences. For it is not only the Gospel that declares it, but Plato,—of whom Cicero is only the exponent,—also maintains that the Good is the parent of the Light; that the movement of the mind which tends toward God must be supplied by the force of love; and that this process, which he calls so admirably *the movement of the wings of the soul*, implies a healthy moral condition and purity of heart; that, in a word, virtue is the only means of developing the wings of the soul.

Who could understand better than Augustine this *Sursum Corda* of the Greek philosopher? But he lacked the courage necessary to break his fetters. Nevertheless, he threw himself with ardor into the pursuit of wisdom. "Oh," he cries, "how I longed to detach myself from terrestrial things and ascend to Thee, O my God! I was particularly pleased with that exhortation of Cicero, in that it excited and inflamed me,

not after this or that sect, but to love, seek, pursue, and embrace Wisdom itself." He remained in this state of wild enthusiasm for several months, and then the first of the momentous crises through which he was to pass in his progress toward truth, terminated.

Two causes combined, with the graver one already mentioned, to wean Augustine from his passionate study of Greek philosophy. In some months he had devoured all that philosophy has systematized in relation to God, to the soul, and to the world, and soon discerned what, later, discouraged him,—the uncertainty of all its systems. He longed for light,—he desired it, as man ever does, full, certain, unlimited,—and only a glimmer flitted before his eyes. He could find nothing certain, nothing complete. All depended on one man, or rather all depended on himself, for he was obliged to form a philosophy for himself, bit by bit, out of this chaos. Thus he was obliged to fill the office of teacher and judge for himself. He attempted it; but what appeared true to-day lacked the element of credence to-morrow. Each day's study brought new light, but fresh doubt also; so that ever believing himself about to grasp truth, and ever baffled, ever embracing a shadow while the certainty eluded him, he resembled a man wild with thirst, to whom is offered a cup containing only a few drops of water, and soon began to assure himself that truth did not exist there, or at least not in the degree of certainty that he desired.

The second reason that led Augustine to discontinue this study was that although he found much that was admirable concerning God, the soul, order, the infinite, the good, the beautiful, the true; he sought in vain in its

books for the most beautiful of all, Jesus Christ. "This name of Jesus Christ," he says, "I had lovingly drunk in with my mother's milk; and it was imprinted on my inmost heart, and without this name, no book, however replete with doctrine, eloquence, and truth, could entirely please me. This was because the inmost fibres of my being had remained untainted." Yes, the fibres which had learned to vibrate in unison with his mother's, while he yet lay in his cradle, could henceforth respond only to the name of Jesus Christ.

Still consumed with the desire for true wisdom, and impressed with the conviction that it was to be found in Jesus Christ alone, Augustine opened the Holy Scriptures. But alas! if he lacked the conditions necessary for receiving benefit from Plato, how much more so for receiving the benefit of the Gospel! An humble mind, a pure and peaceful heart, are needed for its relish and comprehension. Proud minds are not worthy, and troubled hearts not capable, of understanding its mysteries. So, after the first few lines, Augustine shut the book. "I opened the holy Scriptures," he says, "and this is what I perceived: an edifice into which the proud shall never enter; low in its entrances, with lofty vaultings, and veiled with mysteries, nor was it such as I could enter into, nor bend down my neck to the lowness thereof. It seemed to me unworthy to be compared with Cicero's writings; and the swelling of my pride could not bear its humility; and the weakness of my sight did not penetrate into the interior thereof. Yet it was indeed such as would have grown up with little ones, but I disdained to be a little one, and being puffed up with pride, took myself to be a great one." He adds, with still deeper humility: "I essayed in my

youth the reading of the holy Scriptures, but my sinful life rendered them incomprehensible to me; and as my heart was not pure, I could not fathom their depths."

A wonderful fact, and in itself sufficient to prove the divinity of the holy books; that neither genius, nor science, nor the passion for study could ever suffice to penetrate into Christianity's deep and tender mysteries! Humility, purity of heart, love—above all, love—are needed. And this for a very simple reason: they are mysteries of love, and consequently of purity and sacrifice. Let us wait until a ray of these beautiful virtues shall have touched Augustine's heart, and then we shall see him reopen the book which he has closed to-day, and upon reading its very first line, begin to shed those floods of tears which even more than his genius, have immortalized his name. But this day is yet far off.

When studying the soul of Augustine in his nineteenth year, it is very evident that he will not soon return to the Church; for this, he must break through his fetters, and purify his heart, and he lacks courage. But it is quite as evident that he will not return to paganism, nor even to the adoption of purely pagan philosophies; for there are abysses into which the children of Christian mothers never descend; and if error hold his soul captive, it shall at least be error into which the name of Jesus Christ enters without His cross, and which offers the light of the Gospel without exacting its sacrifices. This is, in effect, what did happen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MANICHEAN HERESY—AFTER HAVING EXAMINED CHRISTIANITY, AND FAILED TO COMPREHEND IT THROUGH LACK OF HUMILITY AND PURITY, AUGUSTINE FALLS INTO MANICHEISM—ADMIRABLE CONDUCT OF ST. MONICA—GOD CONSOLES HER—IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT THE SON OF SO MANY TEARS SHALL PERISH.

374—377.

AT that time there existed a doctrine which exerted a singular charm upon many minds. Its origin, which even at that time was old, belonged to no precise date. It had been born of a mixture or union between a fusion of Persian, Chaldean, and Egyptian doctrines, and the Greek philosophies which the conquests of Alexander and the expeditions of Rome had carried into Asia. Who formulated it, is difficult to say, and indeed, it matters little. It would appear, however, that nearly a century before the period of which we write, an Arab named Scythian, had devoted his leisure hours to the work, and, little dreaming of the future, left it as a heritage to his friend, named Terebinth. He tried to give it light, but his effort having proved fruitless, bequeathed it in his turn to a rich widow, who had alone believed in him, and for that reason was made his heir. She had no children, but purchased a slave named Manès, whom she adopted and educated. At her death, he became the heir of the famous doctrine, now a century

old and still unpublished. This was the popular belief in regard to the Manichean doctrine; whether it were true or false, matters little. The main fact is, that whether he received or concocted it, Manès was the first apostle of the doctrine which bore his name. He organized its ideas into a regular system, which he launched upon the world in two distinct forms. The first was entirely pagan, and met with utter failure. Thereupon, Manès comprehended that Christianity had obtained too strong an ascendancy to permit the existence of any religion which should not present some points of harmony with it. So he opened the Gospel, and mingling with cunning skill, the doctrines of the East and of the West, he definitely reorganized his celebrated system, which displayed more vitality in the face of more frequent condemnations, than any other; which the emperors attacked and were unable to crush; which reappeared in the Middle Ages, threatening Christian Europe with peril, even at the period in which the Church had attained the very acme of power, and then vanished, but is, perhaps, not yet dead. For who can assure us that there are not at this hour, secret societies which trace by an unbroken line their ascent to Manès?

It is very easy to assert that Augustine fell into a ridiculous heresy, the most unreasonable and least countenanced of any.* From one point of view nothing is more true, for what could be more ridiculous than to suppose two eternal principles,—one of good and one of evil, two gods, irreconcilable enemies,—the one neither tolerating nor conquering the other? What more absurd than to admit the existence of two souls in man,

*Tillemont, Hist. Eccles., Vol. XIII., p. 18.

—one inciting him to good, the other urging him to evil! And not only absurd, but immoral.

It were unsafe to tell man that he is driven to the commission of evil by a fatal necessity, lest he should rejoice at finding himself freed from all moral responsibility, and startle the world by his utter corruption. Such was, undoubtedly, the doctrine of Manès, but he was careful not to present it in its hideous reality. It is only Truth whose beauty is so perfect as to need no veil. Error always weaves a drapery for herself from the passions of men and the ideas current at the time of her birth, so that men never see her as she really is.

Bearing in mind the condition of the human intellect and of society in the fourth century, it is not difficult to say what imparted to the doctrine of Manès its undisputed charm.

Christianity had just awakened human intelligence, which, weary of examining great problems and finding no solution to them, had sunk into indifference, or was amusing itself with Sophism. Having received a new impulse, the mind began to busy itself again with those great questions which have ever had for humanity so deep and absorbing an interest,—God, the soul, the fall, the struggle between good and evil, the future of the world, the final triumph of truth,—and for three centuries these had served as a support for a number of curious systems, in which were to be found the old idea of the Orientals concerning the struggle between the two great principles of good and evil; the doctrine of Pythagoras in relation to souls; those of Plato on the purification of the heart; in a word, all the traditions of the East and West which their promulgators claimed to have united and harmonized in Jesus Christ. For

all these systems,—and especially that of Manès, the latest born, and most closely patterned after the teachings of the Gospel,—were asserted to possess Jesus as their centre. The coming of the Messias; the Incarnation of the Word; the Redemption by the Cross; all these dogmas, interpreted of course in a way peculiar to himself, formed the base and principal pivot of Manès' system.

Along with the questions relating to eternal things, this system also professed to solve grave social questions. The world was at that time suffering as it has rarely suffered, and any doctrine that ignored its woes, or held out no remedy, would have utterly failed in attracting it. So Manicheism announced the reform of society, and a complete amelioration of its laws, manners, and institutions. This immediate and total regeneration was to be effected by the effusion of the Holy Spirit, now near at hand.

A curious doctrine this, we admit, and but little likely to seduce souls in our day. But it met with an eager welcome at a period when the impotence of human interference had been proved to a discouraged world, which saw the efforts of Christian emperors meet with no better success than had those of the pagan Cæsars, and realized that for its abysmal woe God alone held the panacea.

Such was Manicheism,—a combination of a system of philosophy, a theology, a religion, and a form of worship, thrown into strong relief by a background of near and thorough social reformations. Granted that the train of ideas which it presented, here and there lacked connection by the chain of logic; is it logic which governs the world? We know that it has never

been a favorite with it. Without doubt wildly foolish ideas were to be found in its chaos, but in the same coil with the most sublime; lofty aspirations, if shameful consequences; a grand result proposed if means utterly insufficient to produce it; in a word, just what is required to attract the daring and inconsequent minds of youth. Show them an apparently grand idea and in the course of its development they will swallow a tissue of absurdities.

Let us add to these seductions the greater one of successive and mysterious initiations; for Manicheism was a secret society. Its doctrine was imparted gradually and slowly; so as to enable its teachers to remove any objection which should arise in the mind of the neophyte, by the assurance that later the revelation of the light in its entirety would dissipate his present difficulty. It served, also, to conceal the corruption which permeated the sect, behind a veil that was lifted slowly.

Manicheism had still another snare with which it sought to entrap the minds of men. As the process of initiation proceeded, the absolute independence of human reason was established. The intellect of man was to submit itself to no authority.

"The stern, dread authority of the Church," says St. Augustine, "was ridiculed and cast aside." They believed that only which they desired to believe. A thousand years before Luther's advent, the right of private judgment was erected into a dogma.

We now begin to see how potent the charm which such a doctrine must have exercised over a mind like Augustine's, which was weary of authority, and reveling in the pomp of human reason;* hungering for

* De Utilitate Credendi; Ch. I., p. 53.

truth, but anxious to find it unaided;* eager for the solution of great problems, and not perceiving that their only solution is to be found in Jesus Christ. Along with this, we may readily understand, how gladly his heart, consumed with passion, must have greeted a doctrine which dispensed with repentance by eliminating all motives of remorse.†

The Church was powerless to protect him, for he would not accept her teachings. Without consulting his mother, or acquainting her with his action, he publicly abjured the faith of his childhood, and had his name inscribed on the list of the auditors, which constituted the first degree of initiation into this sect.

Augustine has now wandered far indeed from the true fold, and this before the completing of his twentieth year. We are terrified when we view the rapid growth of the evil passions in his soul! At the age of sixteen, they first begin to manifest activity; he does not crush them, so they wax strong, and at nineteen have bound him by the chains of a guilty paternity, in one of those unhallowed connections which empoison life. As his heart becomes corrupt, his intellect is obscured; his faith grows dim. He seeks truth, but can no longer discern it in the Church, because truth can only be discerned by the clean of heart. Therefore he embraces a gross heresy which will hold him captive for nine miserable years.

Still a boy, he is subject to the two strong evil influences of a false doctrine and a misguided woman. "O eternal King! behold the objects which Augustine pre-

* Confessions, Book III., Ch. VI.

† Ibid., Book III., Ch. IV.

fers to Thee, which dazzle his soul, darken his mind, and blind his heart." *

374 is assigned as the date of Augustine's entrance into the Manichean catechumenate. We shall see later why he never rose beyond it. He carried into it the same ardor, sincerity, and passion which had characterized his quest of truth, and which were at once his honor and his safety, amid the different errors which he embraced.

He constituted himself the apostle of Manicheism, and propagated it with enthusiasm. He challenged the Catholics to hold controversies with him, which challenges they accepted, but unfortunately for them, and still more unfortunately for Augustine, success ever ranged itself upon his side. Such triumphs inflated his heart more and more, and gradually led him to incur the most fatal danger to which those who err are exposed; that of self-will and obstinacy.† It may be readily supposed that Augustine's success was chiefly among his friends and fellow-students.

He now begins to appear as the centre of a group of friends, whose affection for him had been aroused by the indefinable charm of his personality, and was developed and kept constant by the ardor with which he reciprocated it. We have already gained some acquaintance with Romanianus; later we shall know all his other friends; the chaste and gentle Alypius; the boyish and admirable Nebridius;‡ Honoratius, who grew enthusias-

* *Oraison Funèbre de la Princesse Palatine.*

† August., *De duabus Animabus*, Ch. IX.

‡ *Nebridio, adolescenti mirabilis animæ.* *Confessions*, Book VII., Ch. VI.

tic at the very sound of the word, truth. How fervently Augustine loved them, and how beautifully has he described the happiness of living in their society:* "Sweet is the intercourse of friends; to read pleasing books together, to jest together, and then be grave together; to dissent from one another sometimes, without ill-will, as a man would do from himself, and by this disagreeing to season, as it were, and better relish our agreeing in many others; to teach one another something, or learn something from one another; to wish for the coming of the absent ones with uneasiness, and receive them with joy on their return. These and such like signs proceeding from the heart of such as mutually love one another, and expressed by the countenance, by the lips, by the eyes, were the fuel that melted souls and fused them into one." †

Augustine's heart was affectionate. He loved much, and consequently was much beloved. So complete was the ascendancy which he gained over his friends, that the greater number quitted Africa to follow him to Rome, Milan, Ostia, everywhere. Having once known him, they found it impossible to dwell apart from him, therefore it is hardly to be expected that they should have resisted being drawn into his heresy. In point of fact, nearly every one yielded; Alypius, Honoratius, Nebridius, Romanianus even, and that other young man whose death subsequently drew so many tears from Augustine.

St. Monica was watchful; she followed her son's

* August., *Ad Prosperum et Hilarium*; Lib. II., Ch. XX. Confessions, Book IV., Ch. I., and Book III., Ch. XII.

† Confessions, Book IV., Ch. VIII.

career too closely to have a single movement of his escape her. She had seen faith lost amid the mists of passion; and whatever brief hope had been awakened by the contempt for earthly things and love of truth, which the perusal of the "Hortensius" had aroused in his heart, must have fled when she beheld the disgust with which he rejected the Holy Scriptures, his contempt for the authority of the Church, and his overweening confidence in himself. She looked for new catastrophes. Like a mother who from the shore watches her son upon the raging sea, and hears the rending of the sails and the dragging of the anchors, the presage of inevitable shipwreck, she sank powerless beneath her woe.

But when the sorrowing friends of Alypius, Romanianus, and of Augustine's nameless friend—for all three were natives of Thagaste*—came to her and told of Augustine's zeal and obstinacy in heresy, all that had gone before seemed as nothing. St. Augustine seeks for a comparison by which to make us comprehend the depth of her grief, and tells us, under a thousand forms of speech, that his mother's tears flowed unceasingly; that their abundance resembled that of rivers which overflow their banks. Then, finding all these too weak, he finally compares it to the sorrow of a mother who has lost her only son. "For she looked upon me as dead, by the faith and the spirit which she had from Thee, and therefore she wept for me with deeper grief than mothers weep for the corporal death of their children."

Monica did not, however, content herself with weeping. Tears had sufficed her when it was only the heart of Augustine that evil had invaded; so long as con-

* Confessions, Book III., Chap. XI.

science survived, and the light of faith burned steadily in his mind, hope remained ; but it fled when she heard that, not content with offending God by his sins, he had denied Jesus Christ, and apostatized from His Holy Church ; and she realized that she must act, and act energetically, if her son was to be saved at all.

The vacation was close at hand, and Augustine about to return to Thagaste. Monica resolved to wait and receive the assurance of his apostasy from his own lips, for she could not believe that her son was capable of so great a crime, and like all mothers, hoped against hope. But when the awful fact was no longer to be disbelieved, and Augustine reëntered his paternal abode with all the pride of a sectary, at the very first words indicative of his heretical opinions,—O, sternness of maternal duty,—St. Monica arose indignantly. She felt herself insulted, outraged in her holiest and tenderest feelings. And her love of God, her attachment to the Holy Church, her yearning tenderness for her wayward son, and fear of losing him eternally, combined with her horror of heresy, to effect the commission of one of the noblest and most energetic actions that have ever been recorded in the lives of the saints. She drove Augustine from her presence, and declared that she would neither suffer him at her table, nor beneath her roof. Filled with detestation of his blasphemous doctrine, she ordered him, with that sublime wrath which invests a parent with such irresistible authority, to leave her house and enter it no more. Such a command is not to be resisted. Augustine submitted in silence, and withdrew to the dwelling of Romanianus.

Cruel are the necessities which engender such acts as these ; and were it not that God comes at once to the

aid of mothers under such conditions, they would sink beneath their sorrow. It was thus with Monica. The very inmost chord of her being, which seemed beyond the touch of ordinary human sorrows, had been snapped asunder by this woe. So, when Augustine had gone out of the house, from which she had driven him, she who loved him so passionately that she could not pass a single day without seeing him, Monica gave way to the natural feelings of a mother, and falling on her knees shed floods of tears, and called on God for help.*

God heard her prayer; for shortly after, it may be during the very night which followed this sad day, the Saint, exhausted by grief, fell into a brief slumber, and had the following dream: "She saw herself standing upon a certain rule of wood, and a beautiful young man coming toward her, cheerful and smiling upon her who was so sorrowful and spent with grief. He asked her the cause of her sorrow and of her daily tears, with intention to instruct her, not to learn of her; and she having answered that she bewailed the loss of her son, he bade her be easy, and pointing to the rule on which she stood, added: Where you are, there is your child also; when, upon looking, she perceived me standing by her on the same rule." He adds: "Whence was all this but from Thy ears being open to the cry of her heart." †

Deeply moved, Monica hastened to Romanianus' house, and recounted her dream to Augustine. He listened to her gravely. He knew his mother too well to think of questioning her sincerity, but endeav-

* Confessions, Book III., Chap. XI.

† Ibid.

ored to interpret the vision to his own advantage. According to him it signified that where he stood Monica would stand at some future day. "No, no," replied the Saint. "He did not say, 'where he is you shall be,' but, 'where you are he shall be.'"* And filled with hope, and feeling a certainty that God would restore Augustine to her when she should have wept the full measure of her tears, and humbly accusing herself of lack of self-sacrifice and fervent prayer, she withdrew the prohibition, which had been as painful to her as to Augustine, and restored him to his place in her house and at her table.

This occurred about 374, during the September vacation. Shortly after, Augustine, having attained his twentieth year, completed his studies, and quitted Carthage finally. Both his talents and attraction pointed to the bar, but while waiting for the time when he could enter upon his legal career, he opened a school of rhetoric at Thagaste.†

But alas! he did not return there alone, and it was quite obvious that under such circumstances he could not take up his abode beneath his mother's roof. So he accepted the offer of one of Romanianus' houses, which he occupied during his stay in Thagaste. But he was constantly at his mother's house. "My mother's affection for me was so great," he says, "that she could not endure to see me sad, nor pass a single day without seeing me."

And this is not to be wondered at, for notwithstanding

*"Non inquit, non enim mihi dictum est; Ubi ille et tu sed Ubi tu et ille." (Confessions, Lib. III., Cap. XI.)

† Possidius Augustini Vita, Chap. I.

ing his passions, and obstinacy in heresy, Augustine was one of the most affectionate and devoted of sons.

Both were careful to avoid all discussion; Augustine, through respect for his mother; and Monica, because it was in accordance with her chosen line of conduct, for she depended on prayer rather than on controversy to effect her son's conversion. "While I lay wallowing in the mire of the deep, and the darkness of error," says St. Augustine, "that chaste, pious, and sober widow—such as Thou lovest, O God,—now more cheerful in her hopes, yet no way slacker in her sighs and tears, ceased not in all the hours of her prayers to bewail me in Thy sight. And her prayers were heard by Thee, although the hour was not yet come for me to emerge from the darkness in which I was plunged." *

Though Monica refrained from all argument with her son, both because her humility made her doubt her ability to convince him, and also through fear of uselessly wounding his feelings, she sought men whose talents and authority entitled them at least to a respectful hearing, and entreated them to hold controversies with her son.

One day she learned of the arrival in Thagaste of a learned and venerable bishop, whose name has not been preserved to us. He possessed a profound knowledge of holy Scripture, while his deep study of his own faith had made him an able exponent of its principles and tenets. But what invested him with a peculiar interest in Monica's eyes, was the fact, that in early life he had been a Manichean. Monica hastened into his

* Confessions, Book III., Ch. XI.

presence, her heart beating high with the hope that her vision was about to meet with realization. She told the bishop her story, and begged him to save her wandering son. But the holy old man was well versed in the knowledge of the human heart. He shook his head in response to Monica's pleadings, and told her that the time had not yet arrived for what she desired; that her son was yet too new in heresy, and consequently too stubborn.

"Let him alone," he added; "only pray fervently for him." And then, to console her, for St. Monica was weeping bitterly, he related his own history. When but a very little child, his deceived mother had given him to the Manicheans, but when older he read, and even transcribed almost all their works; and in doing so, he had himself found out, without any one disputing with or convincing him, how much that sect was to be abhorred, and had therefore forsaken it, adding, "So will it be with your son. He will himself recognize the vanity of this heresy." But St. Monica still continuing to importune him to argue with Augustine, he answered: "Go your way; it is impossible that the son of such tears should perish."

These words carried joy to the very core of Monica's heart. They were uttered, not for her consolation alone, but for the solace of all Christian mothers situated like her, and if it were not for our reluctance to detain our readers from the perusal of this history, we would endeavor to show forth how much light, consolation, and deep instruction are contained in these simple words: "It is impossible that the son of such tears should perish."

In our opinion, the venerable bishop's words may be

interpreted in two senses. In the first place, they were inspired by faith, and comprehension of the tenderness, mercy, and infinite love of God for man, and the impossibility of His turning a deaf ear toward the human being who suffers, weeps, and implores His assistance. If the sorrow of a human being can arouse the sympathy of his fellow-creatures, it is impossible that his prayers to God should prove fruitless. And if ever the unhappy day were to dawn that should see no prayer arise from the lips of men, mothers would still continue to pour forth intercession for their erring children,—and if ever the still more unhappy day were to dawn when God should swear in His anger never more to hearken to prayer of humanity,—there are tears that shall still wring mercy from Him; and these are the tears shed by a mother at the peril of her child's soul. To deny that He would resist such a prayer, the most sublime, pure, ceaseless, and unselfish, and if I may so speak, most divine of all prayers, and which has been known to move savage beasts to pity; would be to assert that He is without mercy or compassion. In what measure then shall they be heard by a great and good Being in whom hope finds a refuge when all other resting-place is denied her?

So, mothers, whose sons have strayed from the right path, accuse not heaven, but yourselves. Strike your breasts. Weep for not being able to weep enough. And be certain that your sons shall be restored to you when you have filled the measure of the tears that their salvation demands. This is the first meaning contained in the celebrated words: "It is impossible that the son of so many tears should perish."

But along with this more lofty signification they

contain, to our mind, another beautiful and profound meaning,—which commends itself not only to the theologian, but to the moralist; not only to the man of faith who knows God, but to the man of experience who has studied the human heart,—“It is impossible that the son of so many tears should perish,” may be translated thus: “It is impossible that the son of such a mother should perish.” As if the venerable prelate, gazing upon that weeping mother, had said to himself: “It is impossible that such a mother should not have formed in her son an imperishable conscience; that she should not have communicated to him something of the sacred fire which consumes her own being; that she should not have implanted far within his inmost heart, beyond the reach of passion’s withering touch, an intense, pure love of God, and a horror of evil.”

And though the youth may wander for a time, seduced by the pleasures of youth and the temptations peculiar to the age, and even though he should forget the faith of his childhood and deny the God of his mother and apostatize from the faith, let her not be discouraged; the fire is still burning beneath the ashes; the arrow is still in the wound; beneath the scorching waves of passion there must remain in the conscience formed by a Christian mother, some trace of her lessons, and some ineffaceable imprints of faith,—just as the beautiful vases of alabaster, which have once held a precious perfume, preserve its indestructible aroma throughout a thousand profanations.

This is the second meaning which we read in the words of the aged and saintly bishop. Monica returned home, pondering them in her heart. And even as we sometimes see the winds grow still, and the sky clear

with the last rays of light, so the utterance of this old man quieted her anguish and renewed her hope.

Moreover, God joined other signs, which Augustine has not thought fit to reveal to us,—“precious pledges which Monica preserved in her heart; a promise, as it were, signed by the hand of God, which she presented to him unceasingly in her prayers, so that He might not forget to redeem it.”*

* Confessions, Lib. V., Chap. IX.

CHAPTER VII.

A GLEAM OF THE SACRED FIRE—ARRIVAL OF FAUSTUS—THE
POWER OF A MOTHER'S TEARS—END OF THE MANICHEAN
PHASE OF AUGUSTINE'S LIFE.

377—383.

A CLOSE study of Augustine at this period of his life will convince us that the bishop's estimate of his condition was a true one. His mind and his heart were not in union with God, but neither were they inimical to Him. A remnant of the sacred fire was still smouldering within the inmost recesses of his heart. Faith had fled, but honor, probity, delicacy of sentiment, and love of truth still lingered; and even in the midst of passion, a certain modesty, which was like some balm preventive of utter corruption. These, to quote St. Francis of Sales' words, were the *handles* by which God would one day seize and save him.*

Much has been said and written concerning Augustine's transgressions. But we should view these from the proper stand-point, and not permit ourselves to be misled by the expression of the Saint's humility. Without doubt his heart and his will were stained with evil; but he had not descended, and never did descend, to indulgence in those degrading excesses from whence there is seldom a return. He observed an un

* Treatise on the Love of God, Part I.

swerving fidelity to the mother of Adeodatus,* and was devotedly attached to the boy himself. It would have been quite easy, and not at all unusual, for Augustine to have disowned this son,—born in the twentieth year of his father's age; but far from doing so, he determined to abandon neither child nor mother, and for their support undertook the most ungrateful labor, which marred his future and hampered his genius. "He retained," to quote the expressive language of M. Villemain, "dignity of soul even in the midst of the passions with which he has so bitterly reproached himself." †

It is equally true that the mind of Augustine was tainted by evil as well as his heart, but no more depraved than was the latter.

The heresy which he had embraced and advocated so passionately among his relatives and friends, he had only accepted and preached because he deemed it to be truth. "O truth, truth," he exclaims, "how entirely even then did my soul sigh after thee, when they were often repeating thy name to me many ways, not by word of mouth only, but also in many and large volumes. I hungered for thee, and such were the empty husks they offered wherewith to appease my longings." ‡ And further on he says: "O my God, I now confess to Thee who had pity on me when as yet I did not confess; in striving to find the truth, it was Thee I sought, but I sought Thee afar off, whereas Thou wert more interior than what was most intimate in me, and

* Confessions, Book IV., Chap. II.

† Tableau de l'Éloquence Chrétienne au IV. Siècle, p. 378.

‡ Confessions, Book III., Ch. VI.

higher than what was highest in me." And God discerned this in Augustine's conscience. He adhered to error, but in reality sought and loved truth only.

But pride dominated his soul. He was conscious of possessing the wings and the sight of the eagle, and he longed to soar aloft. He thirsted for glory, for the applause of the theatre, and longed for the wreath awarded to the victor in the contests of poetry and eloquence. But to attain these honors, he would have neither sold his pen, nor betrayed his conscience, nor dishonored his life. "I remember also when I had undertaken to try upon the theatre for a prize in poetry, a certain soothsayer sending to me to know what I would give him that by his help I might overcome, I repulsed him full of horror." This did not hinder him, however, from winning the prize; and he was publicly crowned in the theatre by the proconsul Vindician, probably about the year 378.

The same probity and elevation of sentiment are perceptible in the manner in which he discharged his duties as professor of grammar and rhetoric.

The glorious gift of language had been perverted to the basest uses by the Sophists having used it to express their pernicious maxims. It was played upon by some and made a trade of by all. Such a state of affairs revolted Augustine. He resolved to make it once more what it had been—the instrument of truth, virtue, justice, right, which are so often trampled underfoot by the world, and he endeavored to form the minds of the youths confided to him to perpetuate this work.*

Such was Augustine at twenty-two, alienated from

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. II.

the faith and bound by the chains of a guilty love, but still possessing some remnants of what his mother had communicated to him in his cradle—elevation of mind, dignity, delicacy, devotion, fidelity, all the virtues, in short, which, though they do not excuse the culprit's faults, still plead for his pardon, and often obtain it. "Thou, O God, whilst I was staggering on my slippery way, didst behold some sparks of probity and honor amid the dense cloud enveloping my soul."*

St. Monica, who, amid the utter desolation created in her heart by the fact of her son's passions and errors, had so much need of hope, and who welcomed with eagerness the faintest gleams of good which emanated from her son, at length received a distinct proof of the existence of a remnant of the sacred fire in Augustine's heart. The unexpected death of one of his friends drew such a torrent of tears from his eyes that it was evident to those who best knew the human heart that his case was not hopeless. For where passion reigns supreme, affection dries, and he who gives himself up to guilty pleasures becomes utterly callous to the pure, sweet, and delicate joys of friendship.

"In those years when I first began to teach in my native town," says St. Augustine, "I had a friend whom similarity of age and studying together had much endeared to me. We were of one age, and flourishing in the bloom of youth. We had grown up together, gone to the same school, played together, although at that time he was not so great a friend as afterward, nor indeed was he so later on, according to the rule of true friendship, for that only is true friendship which sub-

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. II.

sists between those whom Thou, O Lord, unitest by the charity shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost."*

After this tribute which the aged bishop, writing his Confessions, pauses to pay to his Master, the youthful Augustine resumes: "But yet that amity was exceedingly sweet, formed by the eager pursuit of the same studies. For he also had abandoned the true faith, of which he had but an imperfect knowledge, perverted by me who had imbued his mind with those superstitions and pernicious fables, for which my mother was bewailing me. In my mind he was going astray with me, nor could my soul be anywhere easy without him."†

For almost a year Augustine and his friend had lived in this sweet union, when a mortal illness seized the latter. Burning with fever, he lay unconscious, bathed in the cold sweat which precedes and announces death. When his recovery was despaired of he was baptized, for, like the greater number of young men at that period, he was only a catechumen. Augustine was present, an indifferent spectator of the holy rite, for he tells us he was persuaded that a little water sprinkled on his friend's body would be powerless to efface the sentiments with which he had imbued his mind. "Therefore," he continues, "as soon as I could speak with him—which was as soon as he could speak—for I never quitted him, so intimate were we—I began to jest, thinking that he would join with me in laughing at the baptism which he had received without his knowledge, and been told of when he recovered consciousness. But he repelled me with horror, as if I had been his

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. IV.

† Ibid.

enemy, and, with sudden and unexpected frankness, adjured me, in the name of our friendship, to speak to him no more in that manner." *

Augustine, deeply astonished, thought it best to comply with his friend's request until his convalescence would permit him to listen to arguments. But God did not think it best to expose the patient to this peril, and some days after, during the absence of Augustine, a return of fever caused his death.

Bitter and overwhelming was the sorrow of Augustine when he returned, to find that his friend had passed away!

We should never have suspected how terrible it really was, if Augustine himself had not recounted it.

"Sorrow for his loss filled my soul with gloom, investing everything with the hue of death. My own country became insupportable to me, and my father's house a wonderful misery. All those things in which my friend and I had taken pleasure together were now insupportable to me. I missed him continually; all was a void to me now that my friend was no longer there, and no one henceforth could say, as heretofore, in his absence, 'Behold, he will soon return.' Life became a burden to me, and tears were my only solace." †

In vain did his mother seek to comfort him, and his friends to divert him from his grief. No religious thought was his to pierce the gloom of his spirit and lighten his burden, so he sank beneath it. "I was restless, sighed, wept, and was distracted, bereft of ease and counsel; for I carried about with me a soul all

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. IV.

† Ibid.

wounded and bleeding, impatient to be any longer carried by me, and where to lay it down to rest I knew not. Neither shady groves, nor plays, nor song, nor perfumes and bouquets; neither sleep, books, nor poems could give me delight. I loathed everything, even the light. Whatever was not my friend was insupportable to me, save sighs and tears, for in these I found some slight alleviation." *

Presently Augustine became convinced that he must leave Thagaste. The streets which he and his friend had traversed together, the public places which they had frequented, the spots in which they had pursued their studies, and which had witnessed the development and progress of their pure and ardent friendship, had become odious to him since the latter's death.

"I wondered," he says, "that the rest of mortals could live now he was departed whom I had loved as if he were never to die, and much wondered that I myself, who formed but part of him, could live when he was gone. Well does that poet express himself who terms his friend the half of his soul, for I felt that my soul and his were but one soul in two bodies, and therefore I loathed life because I was unwilling to live by halves." †

Finally fears began to be entertained for Augustine's health. He was consumed with languor, and wept the livelong day. He was totally unfit to perform his duties, and it soon became evident that at all hazards he must be diverted from his absorbing sorrow. His friends counselled him to quit Thagaste and return to Carthage. He consented, hoping that change of scene, the excite-

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. VII.

† Confessions, Book IV., Ch. VI.

ments of a great city, and the absorbing occupations in which he would be engaged, would furnish some alleviation to his grief.*

This departure was a fresh blow to Monica, for, although for the sake of his health, and perhaps his very life, she was resigned to see him quit Thagaste, she trembled at the name of Carthage. He had already lost there both his innocence and his faith, and she dreaded lest the last breath of divine fire should be quenched in its guilt-laden atmosphere.

But happily the school of sorrow is a grand one, and particularly so for a noble soul. Augustine returned to Carthage, not, indeed, converted. He was still far from that, not even stripped of his cherished illusions, for, on the contrary, it would appear that ambitious motives chiefly directed his return.† But he had learned something of the vanity of this world. The plaint of Job had found its way to his lips, and he began the grand death-chant whose first notes have hardly been voiced than the soul is rendered better and purer.

This chant has two parts. The first is sad. It mourns the passing away, the withering of all earthly joys; and this is what Augustine was pondering on his way back to Carthage.

“O my God,” he says, “what sore grief can the soul find in this world, who seeks beauty and rest apart from Thee? Vain is the beauty of creatures. They have their rising and their setting. In their rising up they begin, as it were, to be; they grow up toward perfection, which, when they have attained, they fade away

* Possidius Vita, sancti Augustini, Ch. I.

† August. Contra Acad., Lib. II., Ch. II.

and perish, for all things fade and die. So that when they rise and tend toward their being, the more speedily they advance to be, the more haste they make not to be. Suffer not my soul to cleave to them, O Lord, for they flee away, leaving the soul wounded that clings to them. . . . She would fain take her rest in the things that she loves; but she can not rest in them, for they never stand still, but haste away, are incorporeal, and can not be retained, and no sooner do they appear than they begin to vanish." *

This is the first part of his elegy on the joys of the world. Even if there were no second, it would prove beneficial to the soul, by throwing its sad light upon the world. What effect then is produced on him who mounts into the upper regions of this sad song, and hymns the triumph of joy over sorrow?

Yes, all passes but to return; all withers to bloom again; all dies to be reborn and transformed. This is the triumph that St. Augustine celebrated some years later with divine eloquence, when converted, baptized, and having attained the highest degree of love of God, he learned the secret of life. "What knowest thou, O my soul? Only a few parts of the whole; thou knowest not the whole of which these are parts, and yet it delighteth. Ah! if thou wert capable to comprehend the whole, and hadst not been confined for thy punishment to the prospect only of some small part, thou wouldst have wished for a speedy passing away of all that which at present exists, that thou mightest behold the rest. When thou listenest to what is spoken, thou wouldst not have one syllable stand still, but desirest

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. X.

them to fly away that others may succeed, and so thou mayest hear the whole. So with the world, where things make up one whole, and where if each individual part delight, the whole would delight far more, could it be perceived altogether." *

This is the lofty view which calms sorrow and sustains the soul amid perpetual change. Happy he who has reached this elevation, from whence he can gaze with joy or at least with consolation, upon this succession. But in these days of Augustine's life, he had not yet reached it. Bitter plaints only came from his lips. He raised his eyes to the heavens, but they were empty. He found only a phantom that was powerless to console him. What was he to do? He decided to seek in study a means of diverting his mind from its one absorbing topic.

And so Augustine seized his pen and composed his first work. His choice of a subject reveals the upward tendency of his soul at this period, together with the fact that his passions were granting him a respite.

He resolved to treat of the beautiful.

What do we love if it be not the beautiful? What is the subject of the dreams of the young man? What does the old man retrace in the past? What do we seek from Nature, from the heavens, from the sea, from great mountains, from man, from art? For what does our whole being long? Is it not the beautiful? But in what does the beautiful consist? And then with his recollections of Plato and Cicero fresh in his mind, together with all the beautiful ideas which his own mind was then beginning to conceive, he defined and described the Beautiful.

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. XI.

What a pleasure to read this book, which would reveal Augustine's mind in the first glow of intellectual activity; and perhaps also afford a light by which to view the condition of his soul at the beginning of his twenty-fourth year.

We are quite certain, however, that it met with no more enthusiastic reader than St. Monica, and equally certain that it afforded her some joy and consolation. At least it contained nothing to wound her holiest feelings; nothing which displayed the sectary of former years, whose aim was to destroy in the souls of others the faith which he had himself lost. Who can say even whether the beauty of the style, the grandeur of the thoughts, and the purity of the sentiments, were not accepted by her with the marvellous intuition of a mother's heart, as proof that such a son could not remain forever far from God, who alone was capable of satisfying the cravings of his soul.

But on this point we are confined to conjecture,—for the record has not been preserved to us,—and this first manifestation of a still immature eloquence has vanished like the soft pale light that heralds the dawn of day, whose absence is unheeded in the glorious light of the sun.

To these beautiful studies of poetry and art, to which St. Augustine returned again and again throughout his life, he added others more austere,—mathematics, physics, and astronomy. He studied these with the energy which he infused into every action; applying the force of his luminous mind to the solution of their difficult problems; finding a charm in the relations which he began to perceive existing between numbers, art, harmony, music, and poetry even; relations which

he was destined to develop at a later day with so much originality and depth; vivifying and giving a wider scope to these studies on account of the broad philosophical views which he had acquired.

It is a singular fact, but very easy to explain, and which confirmed the presentiments of his mother,—who had always urged him on in his studies under the conviction that they would lead him back to God,—that it was indeed science, and in particular the sciences of physics and mathematics, which awakened his first doubt as to the truth of Manicheism. It happened in this wise:

To the doctrines which he taught concerning God and the soul, and which, though erroneous, were not destitute of a certain charm of novelty,—arising from the fact of their explaining the great problems of human destiny in a manner entirely new,—Manès had joined, wherefore it is not known, a mass of notions respecting the courses of the stars, the equinoxes, the solstices, the eclipses, which he asserted had been divinely revealed to him along with the rest, but which having been really gleaned from very ancient sources, and compiled by an unscientific person, were manifestly untrue in many particulars, and proven so by the recent discoveries and more exact observations of Roman astronomers. Augustine was thoroughly astonished upon discovering this state of affairs. “Who could have inspired this man with the temerity to write about things of which he was ignorant? What confidence can I henceforth place in him? If I can detect his errors in these matters within, how shall I trust him in those which are beyond my ken?”*

* Confessions, Book V., Chap. V.

He was led by this into examining the Manichean doctrine a little more closely, but as soon as he began to study it seriously, the gravest doubts arose as to its truth.

A short time before, Manicheism had been attacked in Carthage by a certain Helpidius, who was visiting the city. This man had proved publicly that Manicheism contradicted itself, and likewise certain texts of the Old and New Testaments. Augustine had carried in his heart the doubts awakened by Helpidius without heeding them; but now they asserted themselves too strongly to be ignored, and plunged him into deep anxiety. Five years previously he had abandoned the ancient philosophies, because they afforded only a surface of shifting sand, on which he could build nothing firmly; and now at a time when his sufferings were so great as to intensify his ever deep longing for some resting-place for his weary feet, the doctrines of Manicheism were failing him in their turn. Instead of a fixed and steady light, it proved to be but a faint glimmer, that was fast fading into darkness.

Let us add for the sake of truth, and also for the better understanding of that complicated thing called a soul, that this need of light, this desire of peace which Augustine experienced, had not their origin in the higher parts of his nature only; they had their source equally in what was lowest. In reality Augustine found himself very comfortable in this complaisant heresy, which accorded full liberty to passion, and he instinctively desired to retain belief in it. Harassed by doubts, and dreading a repetition of his former anxieties, he hastened to the Manicheans for help. Vainly he submitted his difficulties to the most learned of the sect. He

could gain no solution of them. Able and eloquent when there was question of assailing a doctrine opposed to theirs, they displayed extreme weakness in defending their own. Like skilled hunters who lay their snares about a spring, and, to lure the thirsty birds thither, drain or cover all other adjacent springs with foliage, the Manicheans thought they had won their cause when they had annihilated every other system.

With vulgar minds this method may succeed. But Augustine possessed too lofty and penetrating an intellect not to discern its fallacy. So his soul, which hungered for infinite truth, which alone could satisfy it, became once more a prey to vain conjecture, and consequently to agitation and suffering. He returned once more to the charge. He pressed anew the Manicheans, multiplied his questions, but without obtaining responses capable of restoring his peace.

To calm him and soothe his impatience, the Manicheans announced the speedy arrival of one of their bishops, named Faustus, a man of great learning, who would refute all his objections, dissipate his doubts, and shed a flood of light upon the most obscure portions of the doctrine. Augustine was overjoyed at this news, for his chief desire was to be confirmed in the errors which had appeased his hunger for truth, and accorded some years of a deceitful but pleasant calm, which he was unwilling to resign.

The progress of these agitations of Augustine had not escaped the keen eye of Monica. Prone to hope, as are all mothers, full of confidence on account of her dream, and the aged bishop's words, as soon as she saw Augustine troubled and restless, she believed him converted, and she bore to the holy altar a heart for a

short time free from anxiety. But when she learned of the coming of Faustus, and the fascination with which rumor invested him, her tears began to flow again. She buried herself in solitude, multiplied her prayers and austerities, and awaited events with all the anguish of a mother who sees her son hovering between life and death.

At length Faustus arrived. His great reputation had preceded him. It was said that he was not only a great orator, but also one of those heroic and noble souls who sacrifice everything to the principles they preach. He had forsaken father, mother, children, wife, and country, to devote himself to the labors of the apostolate. He despised money, and was content with his daily bread, harboring no care for the morrow. Poor, gentle, peaceful, and generous-hearted, he would gladly have laid down his life for the cause of truth.

Later, it was discovered that the popular estimate of Faustus had been inaccurate, but at the time of which we write it was the generally accepted one, and drew an immense throng of hearers to the foot of his pulpit.

Augustine was foremost among these. He was charmed. The fineness and vigor of the preacher's intellect, his modest and dignified appearance and manner, together with the beauty of his language, completely carried him away. "I rejoiced with the many, and excelled them in my enthusiastic praise of him." * Later, he heard St. Ambrose, but even his lucid, harmonious eloquence could not efface the memory of Faustus. "I was delighted with the elegance of his discourse, which though more learned than that of Faustus, was not so pleasing or winning." †

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. VI.

† Confessions, Book V., Ch. XIII.

It was evident that the danger was great. Happily Monica had foreseen it, and was praying earnestly.

The intoxication which is always the first effect of eloquence, began to wear away, however, and then Augustine began to reflect and examine. The first thing which he discovered was that Faustus taught nothing new. "When he came, I found him pleasant and agreeable in his discourse, and saying the same thing that others say, only with far more grace. But what relief was it to my thirst to have these beautiful but empty cups set before me." *

In truth, though more brilliant, the arguments of Faustus were no more solid than those of the other Manicheans. He displayed more dexterity in fencing with difficult questions, but no more offered a solution of them than had the former.

Meanwhile, Augustine, with his heart a prey to the deepest anxiety, was awaiting an answer to the burning questions that haunted his mind, and when he beheld Faustus' adroit fencing, which resulted in nothing, he could not restrain a sensation of anger. He longed to interrupt the speaker, state to him his difficulty, and receive an answer which should set his doubts at rest forever. But at that time, as in our own day, custom did not sanction such interruptions in a public assembly, and Augustine therefore besought his friends to obtain him an interview with Faustus. This was easily arranged. Augustine made known his doubts, and received in return a confirmation of the suspicion which he had entertained for some time: that Faustus was not a philosopher. He had studied grammar only,

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. VI.

and that in a most cursory manner. He had read some of the orations of Cicero, some books of Seneca, some of the poets, and the best books which had been written by those of his own sect, and as he was continually exercising his natural gift of eloquence, had acquired the charm which he exerted over his hearers; but this was all that he possessed. Augustine returned home deeply discouraged. He had so longed for peace, and had no sooner grasped what he believed to be it, than he saw it vanish.

Some days later he returned again to Faustus. This time he consulted him, not on philosophy, but on science. It will be remembered that the first cause of Augustine's doubts lay in the opposition which he observed between the scientific and mathematical speculations of Manès and the more accurate observations of the Roman astronomers.

The Manicheans had never been able to satisfy his mind in regard to this opposition, but had always held out the assurance that Faustus would be fully able to do so. Accordingly he submitted his difficulty to him. But as soon as he broached the subject, the latter modestly excused himself from answering.

"For he was not," says St. Augustine, "like those great talkers whom I had met before, who undertook to teach me and yet said nothing to the purpose. He was modest and reserved, and though ignorant as regards divine things, was not ignorant of his own ignorance, nor did he blush to avow it to me." *

This line of conduct augmented Augustine's esteem for Faustus, but served to dispel his last lingering illu-

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. VII.

sions concerning Manicheism. If a man whom the Manicheans put before all others, and declared to be a divine being sent to teach truth, could not dissipate his doubts, he concluded that they were unanswerable.* "Thenceforth," he says, "all my pretensions of making further progress in that sect fell to the ground, not that I quite forsook them, but not finding anything better, I determined to remain where I was until I could discover something more worthy of my choice. Thus this Faustus, who was to many the snare of death, began unwittingly to set me free." †

To what can we attribute this happy result of a conference so perilous? The grateful heart of Augustine declares: "O my God, Thou didst not abandon me in this critical moment, because my mother offered Thee day and night for me the sacrifice of a bleeding heart by her incessant tears." ‡

As we proceed in this history, we must observe the ever-growing forcibleness of Augustine's expressions in describing his mother's grief. The spectacle of his early transgressions had drawn tears from her eyes; now he declares that she offers on his behalf a broken heart, to convey an idea of how deeply her heart had been pierced by the thought of his increasing peril.

And so terminated the Manichean phase of Augustine's life; after having lasted for nine years. It was the second of the great perils through which Augustine passed in his search for truth, and though there exists no written proof of the same, it appears that St. Monica's conduct throughout was most admirable. At the

* De Utilitate Credendi, Cap. VIII.

† Confessions, Book V., Ch. VII.

‡ Ibid.

outset, she advised Augustine of his terrible condition, by ordering him from under her roof and forbidding him to reappear in her presence. Throughout its duration she aided him by her incessant tears, daily counsels, and warnings; by the arguments of learned men, theologians, and bishops; by her acts of humility, self-sacrifice, and penance, which she continually offered up in his behalf, until at length, in the supreme moment of peril, she saved him by a final prayer of so deep and intense a fervor, that Augustine can compare it to nothing save the blood issuing from a wounded heart. Incomparable revelation of a mother's power and duty!

But Monica had barely time to rejoice at the victory of her tears before she received a letter from Augustine, which summoned all her strength to prepare for new trials. Augustine was still far from returning to God; he had merely passed from one dangerous phase of his life into a still more dangerous one, from whence his mother was to extricate him, but only by dint of continued prayer, self-sacrifice, and a love of God and her son manifested in the most heroic degree.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEPARTURE OF AUGUSTINE FOR ROME—HE FALLS ILL THERE
—POWER OF A MOTHER'S TEARS—A NEW CRISIS MORE TER-
RIBLE THAN THE PRECEDING ONES—DOUBT BECOMES AB-
SOLUTE—MONICA HASTENS TO THE SUCCOR OF HER SON.

IN his letter Augustine acquainted his mother with the fact that he had decided to quit Carthage and establish himself at Rome ; that his friends had for some time been urging him to this step, presaging fame and fortune for him in the eternal city. But, while not indifferent to the prospects held out to him, these did not furnish the chief reason of his leaving Carthage, which was, in reality, because of the license and insubordination which prevailed among the students of that city. He hoped to find in Rome pupils more attentive, more respectful, and more susceptible to the beauty of his cherished studies of belles-lettres and philosophy.*

Although it was evident that his departure was prompted by a good motive, Monica's heart was filled with anguish on reading her son's letter. Separation was most painful in itself to one who had never been removed but a short distance from her child, from whence she could speedily flee to his assistance, but the thought of his going to Rome, which had never suggested itself to her mind, fairly terrified her.

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. VIII.

The Rome of that day was far different from the Rome of later years. It was not yet that storied, hallowed city, filled with holy pictures and glorious domes, whither we turn our steps to forget the world, and refresh our souls amid the beautiful memories and holy sentiments which it possesses. Rome, at the close of the fourth century, was, in the eyes of a Christian and a saint, only the persecutor of God's people, the spot from whence had emanated the decrees which shed torrents of Christian blood and awarded the martyr's palm to millions; the city in which paganism—driven from all other lands for nearly half a century—had taken refuge, and was still a place of corrupt morals, impure theatrical representations, and sinful dances. It had almost proved the destruction of Jerome, and the remembrance of his experiences there tormented the great spiritual athlete in the desert, and extorted from him those words of repentance and terror which were still fresh in the minds of Christians.

We can imagine, therefore, the alarm of St. Monica. Had Augustine been pious and pure of heart, she would still have trembled. But to see him set out for Rome void of faith, and with a soul under the dominion of passion, was as if she saw him passing over the brink of a precipice. Her resolve was soon taken, for she was a woman of singular promptitude in arriving at a decision. She determined that Augustine should not depart for Rome, or at least not without her. In the peril of his soul, she would not leave him to himself.

Augustine had not counted upon this. He desired to go to Rome, but he desired to go thither alone. He had passed the age when the companionship of a mother is essential to happiness, and had not yet at-

tained the period in which the sight of advanced years and the near approach of a future when we shall no longer have her with us, awaken within the heart a new love which is almost a species of worship. Augustine was now thirty, but for the affection to which I allude this age is not a favorable environment. The heart has lost its simplicity, and retains still too much ardor. Young, daring, and eager to obtain a wide experience of life, he looked upon his mother as a hindrance to the realization of his wish, and though he dearly loved her, resolved to go to Rome alone.

But he was not sufficiently rapid in making his preparations. Before they had been completed, Monica appeared in Carthage. Claspings Augustine in her arms, she pressed him to her heart, and earnestly besought him, with floods of tears, to give up his journey, or at least permit her to accompany him.

To calm her, Augustine promised not to leave Africa.* But he secretly continued his preparations for departure, and when the time for embarking had arrived, asked permission to accompany a friend,—his intended fellow-traveller,—to the vessel. He reiterated his promise not to leave Africa, and declared that he would return as soon as his friend had set sail. “Thus I lied to my mother, and such a mother,” exclaims St. Augustine; “but this sin Thou hast pardoned with many others.”†

Augustine had trusted to this assurance for retaining his mother in the city, and enabling him to go alone to the place of embarkation. But she showed no intention of quitting him, and went along with him to the shore.

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. VIII.

† Ibid.

It was late in the afternoon. The sea subsiding slowly from the fury of a storm, thundered against the rocky coast. A strong land breeze was blowing which drove all the ships to shore, and the vessel in which Augustine and his friend had taken passage lay at anchor, awaiting a favorable wind, which was looked for that evening. Meanwhile, Augustine and his friend restlessly paced the shore, both considerably embarrassed by this insistence of Monica, who remained with them.

The hours went by slowly; the last gleam of day faded from the horizon; the night closed in, and still the wind blew from the same quarter. Augustine and his friend began to express aloud their conviction that the vessel would not be able to sail that night, and that they might as well betake themselves to repose, Monica especially, who was worn out with emotion and fatigue. By dint of entreaty, and fresh promises to remain in Africa, Augustine finally prevailed upon his mother to do so.

On the shore, and not far from their waiting vessel, was a small chapel dedicated to St. Cyprian, the illustrious bishop of Carthage, the ruins of which are still visible. It was to this place that Monica agreed to retire, for in her state of mind she felt more need of prayer than of sleep, and here she passed the night in tears.* “And what did she entreat of Thee, O my God,” exclaims St. Augustine, “but that Thou wouldst not permit me to sail away. But Thou, in the depth of Thy counsel, hearing the sum of her desires, didst not regard what she requested at that moment, in order that Thou

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. VIII.

mightest accomplish the main thing which she always requested of Thee."*

During the night the wind changed and filled the sails, the anchors were weighed, and before the first ray of morning had lit the sky, Augustine, seated upon the poop of the ship, with his eyes fixed on the little chapel in which his mother was praying, was being carried swiftly from sight of his native land.

Morning came, and St. Monica left the chapel, but only to find the shore deserted and the vessel vanished. She became mad with grief.† She ran up and down the shore, making it resound with her cries. She blamed her son. She complained that God had despised her prayer;‡ thought of procuring a vessel to follow him; and then, thinking of the stormier sea on which he would shortly embark, she was plunged into the deepest dejection. "For she loved me far more than ever mother loved her child, and did not know how much joy Thou wast preparing for her by taking me away; therefore she wept and lamented, seeking with sorrow what she had brought forth with sorrow."§

At length, her tears and strength alike exhausted, after having repeatedly accused her son of deceit and cruelty, and finding it utterly impracticable to follow him, she returned to Thagaste, there to shed, "until the day of my conversion," says St. Augustine, "those floods of tears with which she daily watered the spot where she prayed for me."||

St. Augustine arrived in Rome in 383, probably dur-

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. VIII.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

|| Ibid.

ing the September vacation. We should like to know exactly how this wonderful city, then in the perfection of her splendor, impressed him. No barbarian horde had yet laid profaning hands upon her beauty, and the progress of time had only imparted to the stone of her monuments those bronze and golden hues which add so distinctly to their beauty.

Twenty years before a youthful Dalmatian, who was little more than a barbarian, St. Jerome, had beheld it with vivid emotions, passing continually from the Capitol to the Pantheon; from the Coliseum to the Mole of Adrian, declaiming long extracts from Cicero in the Forum, and even descending into the Catacombs with Virgil's line upon his lips:

"Luctus ubique pavor et plurima motis imago."

Was it so with Augustine? His soul was no less enthusiastic than St. Jerome's, but finer and of more exquisite delicacy. Rome's magnificent monuments, of so grand an order of architecture, and framed in so beautiful a horizon,—its aqueducts, temples, palaces, and triumphal arches, expressive of the enormous power and well-nigh infinite resource of the Roman people; the Campagna, studded with ruins, and tombs that were an abiding testimony to the vanity which had erected them,—must have deeply affected him. And if it be true that the sadder we are, the more congenial we find this spot, whose soil is composed of the ashes of the dead, Augustine must have indeed felt happy.

And yet the year he passed at Rome was a bitter one for him. The few beliefs which he had still retained began to disappear, one by one, like leaves before an autumn gale.

On his arrival at Rome he went to the house of a Manichean, to whom he had been recommended; for though he had ceased to believe in their doctrines, he still associated with them. Here,—whether it was that he lived on more familiar terms with them, or that, not having disclosed his doubts, they were less guarded than they would otherwise have been,—it is certain that he was confirmed in what he had only dimly suspected at Carthage; and the sight of utter immorality, scandalous orgies, a corruption which augmented proportionately to the degree of initiation and dignity attained, tore the veil finally from his eyes; for he saw that this wickedness was but the result of the most secret doctrine of the master, who justified it in his most private lessons.

Augustine's noble soul was revolted, and he swore to have henceforth no relations with any disciple of Manès.*

This was a great step gained; and it would seem as if Augustine had now nothing to do save raise his eyes to the Catholic Church and seek of her that truth which he had vainly sought elsewhere. But the end was not yet.

The Church shone at that period with that beautiful light slightly tempered with shadow, which, for our trial, God vouchsafes to His holy spouse only during days of exile. If here and there some of her members displayed weaknesses which made the impious jeer and the faithful mourn, these shadows only served to enforce the brightness beyond.

St. Peter's bark had a great pilot at its helm, St.

* August., De Moribus Manichæor, Cap. XIX. et XX.

Damasus. He had for his secretary St. Jerome, whose faults and enthusiasms we have briefly alluded to, and who now, repentant and transfigured by Divine Love, was beginning to fill the whole Church with the splendor of his eloquence. The year preceding Augustine's arrival in Italy, the Pope, in order to define certain dogmas which were being largely discussed in the world, had convoked a General Council at Rome, and thither, accordingly, the most illustrious bishops of Christendom had hastened—St. Ambrose, of Milan; St. Epiphanius, of Cyprus; St. Valerian, of Aquilea; Paulinus, of Antioch, and numberless other venerable men who were renowned for their virtue. So that when Augustine came thither, he had before his eyes one of those undeniable proofs of unity, catholicity, and indefectibility, which God has only granted to His Church eighteen times since her birth.*

From another point of view the Roman Church afforded a spectacle still more calculated to touch the heart. Virginitv and Charity, those two sisters who entered the world in the same hour, at the foot of Calvary's cross, traversed the world, hand in hand, strewing lilies and roses as they passed. Even in Rome the descendants of such men as Scipio, Gracchus, Camillus, Marcellus, established hospitals, in which noble young maidens, their daughters, tended the sick, dressed their sores, and kissed their feet, thus compelling the astonished world to acknowledge that such love could only be inspired by Truth.

And the chosen few, whose ardent faith and piety raise them far above this world, then existed in Rome

* The Vatican Council has since been added to the list.

also. We read of Paula, Fabiola, Eustochius, and Marcellas, grouped around St. Jerome, who expounded to them the Scriptures, inundating their souls with light, which their hearts transmuted into acts of self-sacrifice of every kind.*

Had Augustine deigned to look at this sight, he would doubtless have been enchanted. But there are conditions of mind in which we gaze at objects without perceiving them. Augustine was so fully persuaded that the Catholic Church taught the most absurd doctrines in regard to God and man, doctrines that were absolutely incompatible with human reason, and destructive of human intellect ; that he never dreamed of turning his eyes in its direction, if we except one brief instant, during which he entertained the idea of consulting some learned member of the Catholic Church who would explain to him its true doctrine ; but whether through a conviction that it would be useless, or through an instinctive fear of the true light, and the sacrifices which it would demand, he abandoned it. Prejudiced against the Church, convinced by his own experience of the falsity of the Manichean doctrine, and retaining a vivid remembrance of the disappointment which had attended his researches into the Greek philosophies, he began to doubt everything, and assure himself with bitterness that truth was only a dream. The consequence was that he attached himself to the school of philosophy called Academician, which taught

* Interesting details concerning the Church at this period may be gleaned from a work published by my friend, M. l'Abbe Lagrange, Vicar-General of Orleans. The title of the work is, "History of St. Paula."

that there existed nothing absolutely certain in the world.

How miserable and strange a sight this! One of the noblest intellects, possessing every quality that apparently would lead to the discovery of truth, seeks it vainly for long years, and after having tossed hither and thither upon the sea of human thought, ends by accepting, as the only certainty, the belief that all things are uncertain. Doubt alone reigns. The light has ceased to shine; and so Augustine closes his eyes, and, sinking back on the pillow of his new belief, tries to rest. *Et nunc regis, intelligite.* And now, monarchs of intellect, understand; ye who seek for light, be instructed.

Is it possible for men to find even troubled rest upon this pillow? I deny it. At least it is certain that if there are some who can, Augustine was not of their number. His mind was too lofty, and his heart, though tainted with evil, not corrupt enough to love the darkness. So neither the social resources nor intellectual pleasures of Rome, nor the success which crowned his labors, could calm the agitation of his soul. A deep sadness weighed upon him, and like a sick man who seeks rest and finds it in no position, he tossed about perpetually on that pillow which could yield him no rest.

At length his continuous mental suffering brought on a violent fever, and for some days his recovery was doubtful. "I was going down to the grave laden with all the evils I had committed against Thee, myself, or my neighbors; many and terrible were they; besides the guilt of original sin, from which I had never been saved."

And yet, even in this awful danger, Augustine did not lift one single supplicating look to Heaven. Twenty-two years before, when a little child, under the influence of a Christian mother, he had forgotten his sufferings in the thought of God and eternity. And now, a grown man, in a great city, far from his mother's protecting care, he would have died impenitent, without priest or prayer, with a sarcasm on his lips, and impiety in his heart. "I did not so much as desire Thy baptism in that my great danger; and, fool as I was, I derided the prescriptions of Thy medicine. O my God, whither should I have gone, had I died at that time, but into that fire and torments which my deeds had deserved in the immutable order of Thy providence."*

Happily, the fever abated, and in a short time Augustine was out of danger.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine, according to his wont, seeks to fathom why God should have averted this danger from him, and what saving interposition prevented God's anger from striking him, when, on the very border of the grave, he was insulting God Almighty with his sarcasm? And, as usual, he ascribes it to his mother. "She did not know I was ill, and though absent, was praying for me. No words of mine can sufficiently express her love for me, and with how much greater pain she travailed of me to bring me forth to a spiritual life than she had suffered before at my carnal birth."

And then he adds the following words, the most eloquent that the tongue, or rather heart, of man could possibly utter: "Thou didst not permit me to die in

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. IX.

the state in which I then was, for my death would have been such a wound to my mother's heart, that I see not how she would have been cured, if such a sad death as mine had pierced the bowels of her love."*

It is said that a mother is never consoled for the loss of her child, but bears in her heart an abiding sorrow which time is powerless to soften. We may, therefore, imagine how a Christian woman would have suffered at seeing her child die guilt-stained and impenitent; what that saintly heart, so tender that it could not regard a tabernacle or a crucifix without a transport of love and faith, would have felt at beholding her offspring, the half of her own soul, as it were, doomed to eternal death!

"No, no," says St. Augustine, "never would my mother have recovered from such a wound. Moreover," he continues, "what would then become of her many prayers, so fervent, ardent, and unremitting? Or couldst Thou, O God of mercy, despise the contrite and humble heart of so chaste and sober a widow, giving frequent alms, ever devoted to Thy saints, never omitting one day the oblation at Thy altar! Couldst Thou despise and reject her tears, with which she did not beg of Thee gold or silver, or any fading, perishable good, but the salvation of her son's soul? No, certainly not, O Lord! Therefore didst Thou hear her, and accomplish her request, according to the immutable order of Thy love."†

As we have already stated, the fever passed, and Augustine resumed his teaching, and his study of the books, sects, and monuments, of Rome. But he had

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. IX.

† Ibid.

regained neither faith nor happiness, for he still held universal doubt as his guiding principle, and was resolved to occupy himself no more with doctrinal questions, and in consequence a deeper sadness invaded his soul.

Nor was this his only trouble. Augustine had opened a free school at Rome. But, despite his great talent, he saw about his chair, disciples who possessed but little taste for study, and an indelicacy which inspired his great and sensitive soul with repugnance, and finally disgusted him with his position.*

His faith in God had perished, and now he began to doubt men. What a martyrdom for a mind, and especially for a heart like Augustine's !

He was becoming completely discouraged, when he learned that the chair of eloquence at Milan was vacant. This was a most desirable position, because the professor was appointed and recompensed by the city, and thus rendered independent of fickle and inconsiderate pupils. It was besides esteemed a most honorable position ; the emoluments attending it were considerable, and above all, it afforded a prospect of liberty.

The chair of eloquence at Milan possessed, besides, a particular interest, in that the emperors, by fixing their residence in that city, had made it the new capital of the world.

Accordingly Augustine applied for the position and obtained it, after a successful public trial before the celebrated Symmachus, Prefect of Rome. He set out with great haste for Milan, a little consoled by the honor, and regarding the future a little less gloomily.

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. XII.

But he still held the principle of universal doubt as absolute, and therefore resolved to occupy himself no more with philosophy, but consecrate his genius wholly to the study of rhetoric.*

Meanwhile St. Monica was not remaining passive. Whether or not she gathered from Augustine's letters, knowledge of the sadness of his soul, or that she was warned of it by the premonitions of her maternal heart, she resolved to go to him. To do so, a long and painful journey was necessary. But besides traversing the Mediterranean, she would have to break up her home, break off the habits of many years, and as she was not rich, was perhaps obliged to sell all she had to procure the necessary funds.

But what sacrifices can make a mother pause, especially when that mother is a saint?

Monica embarked in 385, probably at the very same port where, a year before, she had been abandoned by her son. Perhaps, if time were afforded her, she knelt in the very same chapel of St. Cyprian, where she had passed that sorrowful night, and begged of God the happiness of once more seeing her son, and the greater happiness of assisting and converting him.

At first it looked as if she were not to enjoy either happiness. Hardly had the vessel in which she sailed passed out of sight of the shore of Africa than it encountered a terrible storm. The sea was stirred through all its depths, and rolled its huge billows from side to side of the devoted vessel, so as to terrify even the sailors with its unusual fury.

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. XIII.

Monica alone remained calm. What! she perish without beholding her son once more! Would God hinder her from converting him? She felt an irresistible assurance in her maternal, saintly heart that it would not be so. Therefore she stood erect on the deck of the vessel, and assured the sailors, in a manner which carried conviction to their souls, that the storm would pass, and their port be safely attained. In a short time her words proved true. The winds lulled, the clouds parted, and disclosed to their view the radiant shores of Italy.*

Monica hastened with all speed to Rome, to embrace her son, and judge for herself of the state of his soul. Judge what her disappointment must have been, when on her arrival in the eternal city, she learned that Augustine had left it for Milan.

It is probable that Monica had passed on her way the letter in which Augustine announced his departure; for it is impossible to believe that a son so respectful and so attached to his mother as Augustine, would not have acquainted her with his project; on the contrary, it is more than probable that the letter of Augustine in which he stated that he had closed his school, and intended to quit Rome for Milan, was the principal means of bringing her to her sudden decision. But Augustine's departure was hastened, and he wrote to his mother acquainting her with the fact, never dreaming that she intended to join him, still less that she was already on her way.

Afflicted as Monica was at this unlooked for *contre-temps*, she did not hesitate for a single instant in the

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. I.

accomplishment of her undertaking. Milan is two hundred leagues from Rome, and the road thither traverses the Apennines, but then she had already traversed the stormy sea; and so she set out, animated with the same ardor, and sustained by the same desire of once more seeing her son, and converting him. This indomitable faith is to be found in the heart of every mother who loves God above all things. But God augmented it in Monica; all obstacles were to prove powerless to stay her progress. For her presence was needed. Augustine had entered upon the great crisis which precedes the birth of faith,—a happiness he was to purchase by a mental agony still more terrible than any he had yet experienced. Therefore it behooved St. Monica to be with him at such a moment, and lend him a final and supreme assistance, after which God intended to reward her days of anguish and tears.

It is for this purpose, that He brings her to Milan at the self-same time that Augustine finally gropes his way from darkness into light. She had known the anguish; it was but just that she should assist at the glorious resurrection.

CHAPTER IX.

FINAL CRISIS—DOUBT PARAMOUNT IN AUGUSTINE'S HEART—
ST. MONICA SUMMONS ST. AMBROSE TO HER AID—TO IN-
SURE HER SON'S SALVATION, SHE REDOUBLES HER FER-
VOR.

384—386.

MEANWHILE, Augustine had arrived at Milan, and entered upon his duties in the dangerous frame of mind which we have described in the preceding chapter; having sought truth everywhere, and found it nowhere, never ceasing to love it, but despairing of finding it, and endeavoring to persuade himself that they were the wisest who believe nothing. From this last abyss, deeper, darker than any that had preceded it, he was to emerge a Christian; and well was it for him that it was so, for otherwise the two years of his continuance in it would have succeeded in completely brutalizing him. And it was in order that he might be aided to find his way back into the light, that God sent his mother to him.

But at this awful crisis, even she did not suffice. The hearts of mothers are made of purity, tenderness, and strength; but still, if I dare so express myself, they are not strong enough nor pure enough to produce this second birth into light. The work which the mother's tears have begun, must be finished by the priest who possesses the authority of Jesus Christ, and the deeper the

erring one is sunk in the abyss, the more carefully chosen are the Christian mother and the priest who are to effect his deliverance. This is the reason that after having bestowed on Augustine St. Monica for a mother, God now conducts him within the sphere of St. Ambrose's influence.

This holy bishop was especially qualified to supply the needs of Augustine. His early life had supplied a key to this restless, melancholy, and passionate nature, equally ready to produce great results, or nothing, according to whichever influence should predominate. He had passed his youth in the world, in business and study,—a fact which furnishes the first parallel between Augustine's life and his. Then he had studied rhetoric, and while still quite young, won considerable eminence at the bar, which was another similarity between their careers. Finally, like Augustine, he had been born of a Christian mother; and remained only a catechumen until his thirtieth year; but guiltless of the errors and irregularities of Augustine. This, however, probably served to make them more sympathetic, for he who has always dwelt in serenity and peace, is often better able to comprehend the workings of a passion-tossed soul. So we see, save that guilt was eliminated from that of St. Ambrose, these two lives exhibited a wonderful similarity.

St. Ambrose's career had been directed into a new channel by a wholly unexpected event.

The episcopal see of Milan became vacant. Two parties disputed the election with an animosity which threatened to end in bloodshed. Ambrose, who was then Prefect of the city, appeared in the church for the purpose of quelling the tumult. He was addressing

himself with eloquence to the people, when a child amidst them cried out: "Ambrose is bishop! Ambrose is bishop!"

The voice of innocence was accepted as the voice of Heaven, and the two parties united in raising Ambrose to the vacant see.

Ambrose, then only a catechumen, immediately received baptism; and, after eight days of solitude and prayer, was ordained priest, and directly after, bishop. This took place on the 7th of December, 374.

Like some flower that blooms only in the later hours of the day, did Ambrose's great qualities only develop by his consecration to the bishopric. He became both bishop and statesman, as much occupied with the social condition as with the spiritual care of his flock, exerting himself in the world to maintain peace, and force degenerate princes to respect honor, and remaining closeted for hours with repentant sinners whose hearts he had moved by his tears; writing the boldest letters to kings, and composing hymns of exquisite tenderness and purity for virgins consecrated to God; a man adapted to the needs of every age and of every position, for every danger and all degrees of virtue. Such was the great bishop of Milan.

These qualities, however, were but the prelude to those he exhibited later on. His daily growth in holiness was a preparation for the two great acts which are to his life, its crown and aureole.

Who is there that has not heard of the memorable scene at the doors of the Cathedral, when Ambrose stayed the Emperor Theodosius, guilty of the blood of Thessalonica, from entering?

On this occasion the stayed was worthy of the stayer,

and the conduct of both has shone across the ages, a noble example of painful duty performed.

But admirable as was St. Ambrose's conduct on this occasion, it was even more so upon another and more crucial one.

Let us enter the dwelling of the holy bishop in the wake of a young man who is in the act of presenting himself there, and listen to the words with which St. Ambrose greets him, words which created a saint, and gave to the Church one of her greatest doctors.

One of Augustine's first acts on arriving in Milan had been to visit St. Ambrose. It was only what etiquette demanded, since he was to occupy a high public position in the bishop's city; but a higher motive also prompted the act. "It is a great thing for a young man," says an observing writer, "that his first visits should be paid to men who are not of his own age, who have preceded him in the journey of life, and specially so when glory seems to guard the threshold of their dwelling." * And much more is this the case when sanctity is united with glory.

"Arrived at Milan," Augustine tells us, "I went to Ambrose, the bishop, known to the whole world as one of the most excellent men, and Thy devout servant, O my God. Blind as I was, Thy hand conducted me to him that he might open my eyes, and lead me to Thee. That venerable man received me with fatherly affection, and with a charity worthy of a bishop, assured me that he was rejoiced to welcome me to Milan. I began to love him, not first as a doctor of truth, which

* Lacordaire, Notice sur Frédéric Ozanam.

I had no hope of meeting with in Thy Church, but as a man who was kind to me." *

The holy and illustrious Ambrose receiving the youthful Augustine, the peace of one accentuated by the agitation of the other; this sun setting in untroubled radiance, greeting this rising sun, whose brightness was still hidden by heavy clouds, forms one of those touching and solemn scenes that are worthy of the genius of a great master.

After having visited Ambrose in private, Augustine was anxious to hear him in public. The saint preached to his flock every Sunday, explaining the Holy Scriptures to them with simplicity and eloquence, giving expression to his erudition in the form of refined and ingenious allegories, by means of which he threw light upon the most obscure passages of Holy Writ.

Nothing could have been more soothing to the sick and suffering soul of Augustine than this lofty and harmonious preaching of Ambrose. He abandoned himself completely to its infinite charm, never suspecting that such gentle utterances were capable of inflicting such deep wounds.

But soon he became distinctly conscious of a deeper despair. Every vestige of Manichean belief vanished from his soul. He perceived the falsity of all that had been regarded as true, but was still indisposed to examine the claims of the Catholic faith. He therefore assumed that truth did not exist, and resolved to ignore all doctrines, to occupy himself no longer with dogmas, but devote himself entirely to form, to style, to art for art's sake, the only things in which he still believed.

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. XIII.

"Such was my state," he says, "despair of finding the truth had plunged me into the lowest abyss. I clung to forms of speech, taking no note of and despising the subject matter. Only this vain case now remained in me who despaired of finding my way to Thee." *

In other words, Augustine was on the eve of becoming a Sophist, an artist in words, a seeker of antitheses, an arranger of fine phrases. He ran the risk, therefore, of losing not only his heart and conscience, but his genius itself.

It was at this crisis that Monica arrived. We can imagine the meeting that must have taken place under such circumstances between the mother and son. The strength of deep family affection is never felt so much as in hours of sadness, for Augustine was sad, and Monica along with him, and their souls met in a long embrace.

To console his mother, who doubtless was bending upon him the deep, troubled look that he knew so well, Augustine hastened to announce to her that he was no longer a Manichean. To his surprise she appeared neither astonished nor pleased.† Not astonished, because what was there surprising in Augustine's having broken through the meshes of absurd error? Not pleased, because nothing less than his becoming a pious, fervent Catholic would have sufficed her, and this she was sure to obtain.

So she replied to Augustine, that she desired to see him a sincere Catholic, and inspired by the assurance

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. XIV.

† Confessions, Book VI., Ch. I.

of a saint that her prayers would be heard, and the intuitions of a mother, confidently assured him that she would so see him before she died. Augustine shook his head, and responded only by a bitter smile. For despairing of ever finding truth, he had ceased to occupy himself with questions of doctrine.

But this was precisely what filled Monica with hope. She knew her son too well to believe for a moment that he would be content with such an aching void in his heart, he who was made to believe and to love. So, seeing him plunged into a sea of doubt, without a single plank left to which to cling, she comprehended that the great crisis had come, which, after a moment of supreme danger, would terminate happily. Consoled, therefore, but still trembling, she resolved not to lose a moment, but by redoubling her prayers, sacrifices, and good works, to endeavor to abridge this terrible time and hasten the moment of his conversion.*

Her first act, therefore, after having embraced her son, was to seek St. Ambrose. She knew that he had helped to bring on the crisis through which Augustine was passing, and she was longing to pour out her thanks to him for it. Besides, she desired to know what he thought of Augustine, and to confide to him her doubts, her fears, her presentiments, her hopes, and to conjure him, even more fervently than she had the aged bishop at Thagaste, to enter into intimate friendship with Augustine and make him a Christian.

Ambrose was deeply affected upon receiving her. He could not remove his gaze from that face on which intense love of God, and tender love for her

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. I.

son, had worn such deep furrows, and he preserved a memory of it which time never effaced from his mind. He never saw Augustine that he did not felicitate him upon possessing such a mother.*

On her part, St. Monica was moved even to tears in the presence of him whom she hoped would effect the conversion of her son, and whose first words had produced in him such a state of mind. The piety, sweetness, and intellectuality of the holy bishop completely charmed her and augmented her hopes. She opened her heart to him, and experienced, from the very first, that strong and holy affection for him which every mother feels for the man of God who protects, saves, and, above all, converts her children.†

There is no doubt that she chose him for her own spiritual guide during her stay in Milan. To whom better could she confide the care of her soul than him whom God had chosen to convert Augustine? Her life at this time was made up of one single thought, which influenced every action of her life.

Let us add, that although still young, St. Monica had but two years more to live. Her soul, therefore, was ripening rapidly, and bringing forth its last and best fruits.

Now, in the designs of Divine Providence, it had been arranged that she should pass these two years under the guidance of the greatest spiritual director of that epoch. This is often God's way of acting. When a soul has blossomed in solitude and is about to bloom into perfect beauty, He suddenly transplants it, and places it near some director whom He has secretly prepared for the work of bringing it to perfection.

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. II.

† Ibid., Ch. I.

Once having made the acquaintance of the holy bishop, Monica strove diligently to effect an intimacy between him and Augustine. Sometimes she contrived to have the latter accompany her when she went to visit the bishop. At other times she sent him to Ambrose on one pretext or another, but, in reality, to afford an opportunity to both to improve their acquaintance with each other.

One day she was in doubt whether to fast or not. It was Saturday, which was always observed as a fast-day in the African church, but in Milan she found that it was not so observed, and so was uncertain which course to take.

She could very readily have ascertained what was proper from St. Ambrose of herself, but with the ingenuity of a pious mother, she dispatched Augustine, who returned with the celebrated answer: "Follow the custom of the Church wherever you may happen to be. If you are at Rome, fast with the Church of Rome; but if you are at Milan, do not fast, when the Church of Milan does not fast."

A fact of another nature shows what love, obedience, veneration, and respect Monica entertained for St. Ambrose. It was the custom in the African Church to carry bread, wine, and cakes to the sanctuaries of the martyrs, which afterwards were laid upon their tombs and then distributed among the poor. The first feast-day that Monica passed at Milan, she started for the church, with her accustomed little basket of offerings upon her arm. But, to her surprise, the porter stopped her at the door of the church, and informed her that the archbishop had forbidden the observance of this beautiful custom on account of the abuses attending it.

Monica had never received the slightest intimation of this, and it must therefore have been very startling and painful to her to be thus rudely and publicly stopped at the entrance to the church. But she did not allow the slightest shadow of regret to appear in her face.

St. Augustine says: "She willingly submitted, and instead of a basket full of the fruits of the earth, she henceforth learned to carry to the memory of the martyrs a heart full of more purified vows, to give what she could to the poor, and these fruits of the earth she replaced by the communion of the Lord's body."* Such was her obedience. "But it seems to me," adds St. Augustine, with great delicacy, "that my mother would perhaps have not so easily yielded had this custom been prohibited by any other for whom she did not entertain so much regard as she did for St. Ambrose, whom, for the sake of my salvation, she loved very much, as he also loved her for her most religious conversation, assiduous frequentation of the church, and her zeal in good works, so that he would often break forth in her praise, congratulating me on having such a mother, not knowing," he humbly adds, "what a son she had in me." †

But God was now so arranging events as to arouse within Augustine's own heart a noble enthusiasm for the holy bishop.

One of those periods had arrived in which, if the soul be really great, it becomes sublime; and the more furiously the storm of calumny and persecution rages, the more clearly are revealed its magnanimity and grandeur.

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. II,

† Ibid.

The Empress Justinia, who, some years before, had wrongly permitted a number of Arian courtiers to accompany her to Milan, and, more wrongly still, permitted this turbulent minority to govern her, demanded of Ambrose, in the name of her son Valentinian, still a child, that he cede to the Arians of her court one of the churches in use by the Catholics, either the Portian Basilica—which was outside the city walls—or the new Basilica, that is, the one in which Ambrose himself usually officiated, and which was also the church of the metropolitan see. This was at Easter, in the year 385.

Ambrose refused to accede to the demand of the empress, declaring, with noble pride, that it was not for the priest to betray the temple. These words, added to his refusal, made him incur the hatred of a woman who was all-powerful, and capable of anything to gratify her hatred. Troops were dispatched to seize the Portian Basilica, and even St. Ambrose's own church was surrounded by soldiers. But as the people were unanimously devoted to the archbishop, they did not dare enter it; they retreated to the Portian Basilica, followed by a party of the indignant and excited populace, and for some days a species of civil war was waged in Milan.

Meanwhile Ambrose never quitted the church, either praying before the altar, entreating God with many tears to permit no blood to be shed for his cause, or addressing the people from the pulpit, calming them, and enjoining moderation and respect for the laws, while at the same time proclaiming, in the most energetic and magnificent language, the liberty of souls, and of the church, which is their refuge, their country, and their mother.

To the courtiers and tribunes who came to summon him to surrender the Basilica, urging that the emperor had a right to it, for it belonged to him, he answered : " If the emperor were to ask me for what is my own, although all that I possess belongs to the poor, I would not refuse him ; but the things of God do not belong to me. Does he desire my patrimony ? Let him take it ; if my body, I yield myself to his will. Would you place chains upon me, or put me to death ? I will offer no resistance, nor flee to the altar for sanctuary ; rather would I lay down my life to spare it from pollution."

To the chamberlain, Caligonus, who said to him, " If thou despisest Valentinian's commands, I will behead thee," Ambrose replied, with even greater intrepidity, " God Grant that thou mayest fulfil thy threat ; I shall die as a bishop and thou wilt act as a eunuch."

To the officers of the emperor, who became alarmed at the growing excitement of the people, and entreated him to calm them, he replied, " It behooves me not to arouse their passions ; but when they are aroused, none but God can calm them." When they exclaimed that he was a tyrant, and used his influence with the people to deprive Valentinian of his throne, he smilingly rejoined, " Oh ! that is not what Maximian says of me, for he complains that I barred his progress when he wished to invade Italy." And in truth, it was Ambrose who went forth to Maximian when he crossed the Alps to seize the empire of Valentinian.

" Moreover," continued Ambrose, " if I am a tyrant, why delay putting me to death ? I have no arms save courage. I am ready to die. But God preserve me from betraying the heritage of Jesus Christ ; the heritage of my predecessors ; the heritage of St. Denys, who

died in exile for the faith; the heritage of Eustorgius, the holy confessor; of Myrocles; and of all the other holy bishops, my fathers. I render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."

And to show his readiness to obey, he left his door open night and day, remaining in his usual place, ready to go either to exile or to prison, according to the order he received.

Daunted by such courageous behavior, Justinia relinquished her demand, but only for a brief season, during which she conceived a new scheme by which to triumph over Ambrose. An Arian doctor suddenly assumed the title of Bishop of Milan, and Ambrose having refused to appear before the tribunal appointed by the empress to judge between him and his rival, the holy bishop was declared an intruder and condemned to exile. Soldiers were directed to seize him, and convey him out of Italy. As before, the saint took refuge in the cathedral. What a grand spectacle, to behold this venerable old man, in whom were personified all the rights of conscience, in the sanctuary of his own church, while the waves of the greatest earthly power in existence, broke harmlessly against its portals!

The people likewise remained within the church, gathered about their bishop. They even passed the night armed, and menacing.*

This species of siege continued during eight or nine days, about Easter, in the year 386. It was during this

*The churches of that time were surrounded by several exterior buildings, porticoes, chambers, halls, and gardens, which fact accounts for the people being able to pass the night within them. There were also places where people could eat and sleep with ease.

time that Ambrose introduced into the Church of Milan the mode of singing the psalms then in vogue throughout the Oriental Church, and since adopted universally in the Western Churches.

And in order to vary and give animation to this chanting, he added some hymns composed by himself for the occasion, and which aroused the people to such enthusiasm that his enemies declared that he had bewitched the people with magic songs.* The majority of the hymns are still in existence,† and never would we have guessed from reading them that they were composed, amid the clang of arms and the seething of an excited populace, by one who knew not each morning but that he would be on his way to exile, or in prison, before night! Nothing can be sweeter, purer, or display loftier thoughts than these hymns. Take, for instance, the morning hymn:

O Thou, the Father's image blest,
Who callest forth the morning's ray;

* Ambrose, *Opusc de Spirito Sancto in Epist.*

† The hymns which are attributed with most certainty to Ambrose are the eleven following ones: *Æterne Rerum Conditor*; *Deus Creator Omnium*; *Jam Surget Hora Tertia*; *Veni Redemptor Gentium*; *Illuminans Altissimus*; *Fit Porta Christi Pervia*; *Orabo, Mente Dominum*; *Somno Refectis Artubus*; *O lux Beata Trinitas*; *Consors Paterni luminis*; *Æterna Christi Munera* (See Dom Cellier, "History of Ecclesiastical Authors," St. Ambrose). Besides these eleven hymns the blessed Thomas, in his "Hymnal," adds fifty-two others, and in particular: *Jesu, Nostra Redemptio*; *Conditor Alme Siderum*; *Rerum Creator Optime*; *Splendor Paternae Gloriæ*; *Immense Cæli Conditor*; *Cæli Deus Sanctissime*; *Nox Atra Rerum Contigit*; *Magnæ Deus Potentiæ*; *Tu Trinitatis Unitas*; *Æterna Cæli Gloria*; *Plasmator Hominis Deus*; *Summe Deus Clementiæ* *Lux Ecce Surgit Aurea*, etc., etc.

O Thou Eternal Light of light,
And inexhaustive Fount of day!

True Sun! upon our souls arise,
Shining in beauty evermore;
And through each sense the quickening beam
Of Thy Eternal Spirit pour.

Rule Thou our inmost thoughts, let no
Impurity our hearts defile;
Grant us a sober heart and mind,
Grant us a spirit free from guile.

Still ever pure as noon's first ray,
May modesty our steps attend;
Our faith be fervent as the noon,
Upon our soul no night descend.

This is the charming commencement of another morning hymn :

The star that heralds in the morn
Is fading in the skies,
The darkness melts; O Thou the Light,
Once more in us arise.

The following is an evening hymn. When we reflect what poetry was at that epoch, and that it owed its new birth to this saintly old man, we can understand what a charm must have characterized the personality of Ambrose :

Our limbs with tranquil sleep refreshed
Lightly from bed we spring,
Father Supreme! to us be nigh,
While in Thy praise we sing.

Thy love be first in every heart,
 Thy name on every tongue ;
 Whatever we this day may do,
 May it in Thee be done.

Cut off in us whatever root
 Of sin or shame there be,
 So evermore from bosoms pure
 Be rendered praise to Thee.*

Never do we find a single allusion to the troubled state of the city, if we except the following :

All our woes and fears we show Thee,
 All our secret crimes confess ;
 May our tears and prayers name Thee
 To pardon and to bless !

And again :

O may our feet be guided e'er
 By true and joyous zeal,
 And grant, O Lord, Thy people's hearts
 A holy peace may feel.

Surely the author of these must have been endowed with strength of soul and great self-possession to give expression to such harmonies amid the din of a popular tumult. They were received with the deepest enthusiasm, and sung night and day by the people, who asked to die with their bishop. At intervals Ambrose hushed the holy chant, and, ascending the pulpit, gave expression to his gratitude and thankfulness for the devotion of his people, in language whose eloquence could not be surpassed.

* These first three translations are taken from the second edition of "Hymns and Poems," by the Rev. Father Caswall, of the Birmingham Oratory, England.

These events took place about the years 385 and 386, that is, during the time in which Augustine was dwelling and teaching in Milan. And how deeply must he, who, though an unbeliever, was so appreciative of eloquence, poetry, honor, dignity of soul, and the eternal rights of conscience and liberty, have been impressed by this spectacle!

How he must have loved this old man, who, rather than betray himself, exposed himself to danger—invincible, though unarmed, and recompensed, as is ever the case, with the approbation of all whose praise is most to be desired.

“My mother,” he says, “bearing her part in the solicitude and watchings, lived in prayer, and I, though cold as yet, regard to the heat of Thy Spirit, was stirred up, nevertheless, by the concern and trouble of the whole city.”* The moral grandeur which invested Ambrose like an aureole, next receives an enthusiastic tribute from Augustine: “As for Ambrose I looked upon him as a man happy, according to the world, in being so honored, only his celibacy appeared to me painful. But what hope he entertained in his soul, and what conflicts he sustained with the temptations besetting his lofty position, what comfort he felt in his adversities, and what savory joys he tasted in feeding on the bread of life, these I knew nothing of.”†

As for St. Monica, the sight of her spiritual father, him to whom she looked for her son's salvation, developed into a hero and a saint, thrilled her with an indescribable joy. She haunted the church, hanging upon

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. VII.

† Confessions, Book VI., Ch. I. and II.; Book VII., Ch. VII.

his lips during his eloquent discourses, and sharing largely in the anguish and trouble which prevailed, She lived for God alone; and in that lighted church, amid the holy chants, and perpetual odor of incense, glorious enthusiasms and divine influences, she advanced far in the way of perfection. Faith, love, fervent hope, peace, and trust in God filled her heart with their sweetness, and it was easy to perceive that the hour of her perfection was at hand.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRAYERS OF ST. MONICA BEGIN TO BE HEARD—LIGHT
DAWNS IN AUGUSTINE'S SOUL—WISDOM OF THE PLAN
ADOPTED BY ST. AMBROSE AND FOLLOWED BY ST. MONICA.

ST. MONICA, as we have seen, was not content with having Augustine accompany her when she went to visit St. Ambrose; she was still more anxious that Augustine should form one of his auditors every time he mounted the pulpit—an object not very difficult to accomplish, since Augustine was a great admirer of his eloquence, and even before his mother's arrival had often gone to hear him. The marble chair from which the bishop addressed his flock is still to be seen, in which, during the years 385 and 386, he never seated himself without having before him Monica, and, at her side, the son of so many tears.

Unfortunately, however, while accompanying his mother to the instructions, Augustine did not carry with him the dispositions requisite for the Word of God to penetrate the soul. He went as a critic, not as a disciple. "I diligently heard him when he preached to the people, not with a right intention, but only to make trial of his eloquence, whether it were answerable to the fame thereof, or whether it were greater or less than was reported. For hours I would listen, delighted with the eloquence of his discourse, intent upon his words, though despising the things of which he treated." *

* Confessions, Book IV., Ch. XIII.

In spite of the mental condition in which he listened to St. Ambrose, the divine light began to penetrate his soul. "But whilst I cared not to learn what he said, but only how he said it, there came into my soul, together with the words which I valued, the things which I slighted, for I could not separate them. And whilst I opened my heart to the eloquence of his sayings, there stole into my soul the truth of what he said, though but by gentle degrees."*

Subjected to this influence, Augustine began to move, though almost imperceptibly, toward truth.

"First it began to seem to me that the things he said might be defended, and that the Catholic faith, for which I had before supposed nothing could be said in answer to the objections of the Manicheans and others, might be plausibly maintained."† And again: "I took great delight in listening to St. Ambrose, and though I was not prepared to accept his doctrines as true, they did not seem to me inconsistent with truth."‡ And further on: "Thenceforth I was convinced that whatever my uncertainty as to the truth of her doctrines, the Catholic Church was guiltless of the charges that had been brought against her. I was in a state of perplexity and confusion, and rejoiced secretly that the Catholic Church, in which when a child I had learned the name of Christ, held no such foolish doctrines."§

And so the gradual transformation proceeded. Each day he was freshly astonished at finding that the teaching of the Church was not what he had expected it to

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. XIV.

† Ibid., Ch. XIX.

‡ Ibid., Ch. XIV.

§ Confessions, Book VI., Ch. IV.

be. Certain passages of Holy Scripture which had seemed to him absurd, now appeared susceptible of a rational and even beautiful and lofty signification. He found that, far from teaching certain dogmas which he had found laughable or revolting, she taught the direct contrary. He was struck with shame—for he possessed an honest nature—for having so attacked, not the true Church, but a fictitious church which had no existence save in his imagination.

“I was ashamed to find that for so many years I had been barking, not at that which was indeed the Catholic faith, but at the fictions of my carnal imagination, for I was so rash and wicked as to be more ready to impose falsehoods upon them than by inquiry of them to be informed of the truth.”*

This first faint ray of light was soon followed by another and stronger one. By listening to Ambrose, he was led into examining into the attitude of Catholics in regard to the truth. Catholics insist that men accept as certain, things whose truth can not be demonstrated, and the principal process of faith consists in admitting the limitations of human reason, and reverentially accepting as certain, things that are absolutely incomprehensible to it.

This mode of proceeding struck Augustine as far more sincere than that which was in vogue among heretics, who, he says, “prated only of liberty, evidence, reason, the right of scrutinizing and testing everything, and then a host of things which could never be demonstrated, were by them imposed to be believed.” †

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. III.

† Ibid., Ch. V.

And this process not only appeared to him more modest and more sincere, but, although it commended itself but little to human reason, more calculated to lead to truth, and exhibiting a singular harmony with human nature. How interesting to watch the cloud of error lifting itself little by little! "I began to note how many things I believed which I never saw, nor was present when they occurred, as well in history, and in the accounts of places and cities where I had never been, as in many things which I believed on the words of my friends, or of physicians, or of other men, when, if I were to suspend my belief, an end must be put to all human commerce. I am the son of Patricius and Monica; this I firmly believe, and yet I can not know it save by believing those from whom I heard it." *

Therefore, if neither commercial, nor professional, nor social life be possible without faith, why expect the absence of such a condition in the spiritual life? If every human being born into this world is taught by his mother, his father, his country, and his time, why should he not be taught by his God? And if God does really instruct him, is he not to believe His instructions, to accept them, and accord to religion as large a place in his life as is occupied by family affection, friendship, or any of the noble and holy sentiments to whose existence faith is essential?

This is how Augustine argued; and were we not familiar with his tender, loving nature, we would imagine he was writing under the inspiration of his mother, for this is the light in which religion presents itself to a truly Christian woman. These first principles, so ob-

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. V.

scure, ineffable, mysterious, august, and important, she never discusses; she feels their truth. These clear and profound intuitions have nothing to do with the intellect; they have their source in the heart.

Augustine, having once discovered or accepted this principle, applied all his power of investigation, and the logic which was one of the gifts of his great mind, to make it yield up to him truth.

“Supposing,” he says, “that God has spoken to man, what character would His words have? A character absolutely distinct from that of all human utterances. Man is insignificant, narrow, limited by time and space; and so are his utterances. God, on the contrary, is infinite, eternal, embracing all time, all places, and all souls, so should His words be.” In his search he opened the holy Scriptures, which the Catholic Church holds in her hands, and which she believes contain the true Word of God as it has re-echoed across the ages. He was surprised to find that they resembled nothing which he had hitherto encountered in all the books which he had read; words as old as the world, as universal as space, as single as truth, as holy as virtue, immutable and indestructible, though perpetually attacked; of prodigious fecundity; of supreme moral beauty; words, in fine, that could only have proceeded from an eternal, universal, immutable, omnipotent, and holy spirit, that is, from God Himself.

But what astonished him was its harmony with the human nature, a harmony so deep and beautiful as to render it impossible that it should not have proceeded from Him who made the human soul. “Its authority appeared to me so much the more venerable and worthy of credence in that, though easy of comprehension, it

yet preserved the dignity of secrecy beneath the veil of its simplicity. So simple, clear, and humble in its style, that all can understand it, and yet exercising the best attention of the loftiest intellect. With open bosom receiving all, yet containing profound depths for the piercing eye of genius." *

This additional characteristic rendered distinct aid to Augustine in helping him to conceive of the Catholic Church in her whole admirable plan; embracing, like God, all times and all places, and, better still, all souls; affording light, and the same light, to the great and to the humble, nourishing with the same food the eagles and the doves,—so different from the various philosophies and sects, which are ever narrow, limited, and local, like the minds of their founders; some being adapted only to the perception of lofty minds, and therefore incomprehensible to the people; others adapted only to the people, and consequently despised by the great, but all bearing the defect of an inability to adjust themselves to all times, to all places, and especially, to all souls.

"Such were my thoughts, and Thou wast with me," exclaims St. Augustine; "I sighed to Thee and Thou didst hear me; I was tossed by the waves, and Thou didst steer my course; I walked in the broad way of the world, and Thou didst not forsake me." †

These new thoughts charmed Augustine, but did not convert him. Although he perceived that the Catholic Church was able to refute all the objections of its adversaries, and rewarded its study with conceptions of the highest moral beauty, he did not, consequently,

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. VI.

† Ibid.

conclude that it was the true faith; he merely conceded that its doctrines were beautiful, reasonable, even sublime; that they were accepted by great intellects—by souls whose sincerity was undoubted, such as his mother and Ambrose, and consequently were worthy of careful and respectful study.

He has described the state of his soul at this time, in admirable words, which serve to depict the phase which so many minds in search of truth exhibit. "The Catholic faith seemed to me not conquered, neither was it as yet victorious." *

Henceforth he abstained from ridiculing the faith; contempt left his heart; he had made another step toward the light. "Therefore, wholly renouncing all other teachings, I resolved to continue a catechumen in the Catholic Church, into which my mother had introduced me, till some light should arise to which I might steer my course." †

Had Augustine but chosen some one to confide in, it would have been easy for him to find the light he sought.

But, like a patient who has been the victim of unskilful physicians, he hesitated about making known his state to any one. There was one person, and only one, who might have taken the initiative with Augustine,—solicited his confidence and obtained it; this was Ambrose.

But singular to relate, the latter appeared to be utterly indifferent to the subject of the agitation and mental anguish of the young man for whom he felt, and in whom he had aroused, such a deep affection.

* Confessions, Book V., Ch. XIV.

† *Ibid.*

“ Ambrose knew nothing of my doubts, nor the depth of my danger. For I could not confer with him as I wished to do, by reason of the number of people who came to him for advice and help; and the time that he was not with them was either taken up in the necessary refreshment of the body by daily food, or of his soul by reading.” *

It is totally inconceivable that Ambrose could really have been as ignorant of Augustine's state, as the latter here represents him. The relations between them were too intimate, and Augustine, in virtue of his public position, and reputation for eloquence, too well known for such a thing to be possible. Moreover, he had St. Monica to enlighten him; he saw her frequently, and it is needless to say that there was no topic so dwelt upon by this inconsolable mother as the difficulties and mental agitations of him whose salvation was the one object of her life. But then, if such be the case, why, we ask, did not so learned, zealous, and influential a bishop seek to win to God a man so capable of adding to His glory? Augustine asserts that he was too busy. But what work could be more noble, more glorious, and more agreeable to God, and worthier of a bishop, than solving the doubts of a man who sincerely desired to have them solved, and who when converted would prove so great an honor, and so firm a support to the Catholic Church?

And yet St. Ambrose, far from seeking an opportunity of beginning this great work, failed to take advantage of those which daily presented themselves. We must here quote a page of St. Augustine which affords

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. III.

an interesting picture, in which we see, thrown into relief by a background of gold, as it were, the grand figure of Ambrose, expressive of the calm steadfastness and repose of faith; and at his side, and in sharp contrast with him, the youthful and perplexed Augustine, admiring and observing him in silence, without daring to question him.

“Often when I went to see him—for no one was refused entrance, nor was it the custom to give notice of any one’s coming—I have seen him reading to himself, and never otherwise, and I have sat down, and after a long silence—for who could find it in his heart to disturb one so intent?—I have gone away presuming that in the brief moments which he had for the repairing of his mind, free from the noise of other men’s business, he was loath to be disturbed, and that perhaps this was the reason why he did not read aloud, lest his auditor, being attentive to the reading, might possibly desire the exposition of some obscure passage, and by this means his time might be abridged, and he himself hindered in his reading; or, perhaps, he read in silence from a wish to spare his voice, which was easily weakened. But whatever his motive was, the intention of such a man was certainly good.”*

We can see by these last words how deeply Augustine esteemed Ambrose, and consequently how easy it would have been for the holy bishop to win his confidence. But Ambrose appeared to be utterly unconscious of the other’s mental needs.

“Thus I had no opportunity of consulting this holy oracle, save when the audience could be but brief,

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. III.

whereas my perplexities required one perfectly disengaged, to whom I might impart them all, and I could never find him so much at leisure."*

Evidently there is some mystery here. When, ten years before, St. Monica had implored the African bishop to enter into controversy with her son, the holy old man had replied: "What good will that accomplish?" And when Monica still persisted in her requests, "Pray, pray," he answered; "it is impossible that the son of so many tears should perish." Now, in Milan, St. Ambrose was following the same tactics. He was perfectly aware of Augustine's doubts, but refrained from all controversy with him. Who has ever been led by controversy? Augustine was proud of his reason and of the greatness of his intellect, and was, also, a most extraordinary dialectician. An objection unanswered, or which he imagined unanswered, or an argument which met with no refutation, would have served only to confirm him in doubt, and succeeded in making him believe that truth was no more to be found in the bosom of the Catholic Church than in any of the sects and schools of philosophy whose hollowness he had proved.

Moreover, even were his mind converted, did it follow that his heart would be likewise? Plato asserts that the good is the parent of the light, and that the soul can only develop its wings through virtue. Better than Plato did St. Ambrose know this. And if he was cognizant of the disorders of Augustine's mind, still better was he acquainted with the disorders of his heart. The woman who for fourteen years had disputed with

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. III.

God the heart of Augustine, had followed him to Milan, where their sinful connection was a matter of notoriety. What, under such circumstances, could argument effect? Were it not better to pray, to entreat of God to make this conquest, and wait until the tears of St. Monica should have aroused a tempest in the heart of Augustine which he should be unable to resist?

This was St. Ambrose's plan. So, while keeping up the friendliest relations possible with Augustine, he completely ignored his doubts, and carefully avoided being drawn into a fruitless discussion. He did not refuse to gather this glorious fruit, but left it to ripen before doing so.

Monica had learned from St. Ambrose the reasons which guided his conduct, and eager as she was to behold Augustine a Christian, decided to leave to his wisdom and experience the direction of so delicate an affair, and continued to pray and shed her all-powerful tears at the foot of the altar. "Like that mother who, weeping, followed her son's bier, and at sight of whose tears Jesus Christ gave her back her child, so," says St. Augustine, "did my mother bewail me, carrying me forth on the bier of her thoughts, that Thou mightest be pleased to say to the son of the widow, 'Young man, I say unto thee, arise!'"*

The event proved the wisdom of St. Ambrose's plan. The less others argued with Augustine, the more he argued with himself. The voice of conscience grew more distinct, as the tears of his mother increased, and soon the tempest raged in all its fury. He has himself

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. I.

depicted this struggle in an admirable dialogue in which passion and conscience speak alternately :

PASSION.

“ O Academicians ! ” exclaims Augustine, when yet passion is ruler of his soul, “ ye have excelled all philosophies, for ye have taught us that nothing can be certainly known for the regulating of life.”

CONSCIENCE.

“ Nay, but let us not despair, but seek with greater diligence. Why be discouraged? For it is no slight matter that many passages of Holy Writ no longer seem absurd to me, but appear to me capable of rational interpretation. Here, then, let us remain on the threshold of the Church, where my mother placed me as a child, and there let us confidently await the dawn of faith.”

PASSION.

“ But when or where shall we seek truth? Ambrose has no leisure to listen to my doubts, nor have I leisure to read. Moreover, had I leisure, where should I procure the proper books, or who would lend them to me?”

CONSCIENCE.

“ Nay, but let us make time, and devote certain hours of the day to the salvation of our soul. Great hope appears. The Catholic Faith does not teach that which we thought, and unjustly laid to her charge. If we know this much, why not seek for further enlightenment? The morning is set apart for our scholars; but what do we with the remainder of our day? Why not devote it to this important study?”

PASSION.

“When, then, must we wait upon our influential friends? When prepare the lessons for which we are paid? When rest our weary, anxious mind?”

CONSCIENCE.

“Let all these vain and empty things perish! Let us devote ourselves wholly to the inquiry after truth. This life is full of misery, death is uncertain; if it should come upon us unawares, in what state should we go hence? Where learn what we have neglected? And how escape the punishment due to such neglect?”

PASSION.

“But what if death put an end to all?”

CONSCIENCE.

“This, then, must also be examined into. But no, such a thought is criminal. It is no vain, empty matter that the authority of the Christian Faith should have attained this glorious eminence over all the world. Never would God have wrought such great and wondrous things for us if the death of the body were to put an end to the life of the soul. Why do we delay renouncing the hopes of this world to seek after God and true beatitude?”

PASSION.

“But stay a little; worldly joys are sweet and pleasant; we must not part with them too hastily, for it would be disgraceful, after once renouncing, to return to them again. I am on the eve of obtaining an honorable post which will afford me ease and competence. I have powerful friends, and may reasonably hope for a

presidentship. Then I may marry a wife with some fortune, who will therefore be no burden to me, and so shall I be happy! Many illustrious men worthy of imitation have been married, and yet have devoted themselves to the pursuit of wisdom."* "Thus," adds Augustine, "as I was tossed hither and thither by contrary winds, time ran on, and I remained irresolute."

So commenced the conflict in the soul of Augustine, which was to rage for another year with such awful violence, which Augustine often sought to end by stifling conscience itself, but which his watchful mother always aroused again, conscious that in this conflict lay his last hope of safety, and which did indeed terminate in victory, but a victory dearly purchased by both mother and son. This wonderful conflict of the man against himself affords us a revelation of Augustine's real greatness. To seek truth, to desire it ardently, to hesitate before the sacrifices it demands, yet make it weeping, but finally, is, as Seneca has so grandly said, a spectacle worthy of a god. *Ecce par Deo spectaculum; vir cum adversis compositus*. And St. Paul, taking a still higher flight, after having portrayed man hesitating between good and evil, lamenting at being obliged to do the good, but doing it amid the protests of his entire nature, cries out: *Spectaculum facti sumus Deo, et angelis, et hominibus*.

Grand, however, as is the spectacle of such a struggle, there is one grander still, and that is the power which mothers possess of awakening such storms in the hearts of their children, either by means of the divine aspirations implanted therein in the days of infancy, and

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XI.

which no earthly passions can succeed in stifling, or by means of her prayers, which, when passions seem to have extinguished all, are capable of reviving the spark which still lives beneath the ashes, and kindling therefrom, as in the case of Augustine, so glorious a fire.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REAL OBSTACLE—THE ENERGY AND DELICACY WITH WHICH ST. MONICA STRIVES TO REMOVE IT—BIRTH OF FAITH IN AUGUSTINE'S SOUL.

IF Augustine's heart had been pure, the fire of faith and divine love would have kindled readily; but, as we know, he was entangled in the meshes of a guilty connection which had now lasted for fifteen years. What he had so longed for in his youth, he had received; and if the length and hardships of a journey of over six hundred leagues had not made Augustine's mother pause, they were equally inadequate to restrain the mother of Adeodatus from joining him at Rome, whence she had accompanied him to Milan, where they were living together, with Adeodatus, who served as an additional link between them, and was a deep source of joy to both by his precocious genius. How abandon such a position? and yet, until this chain was broken, how could it be possible for Augustine to receive the gift of faith, or the sacrament of holy baptism? This was Monica's constant thought. She perceived perfectly that the scene of the conflict was shifting from the mind to the heart of her son. It was no longer a question of light, but of virtue, between God and him, and consequently Monica became terrified, for she well knew the heart of Augustine, and the deep and faithful love it held for the mother of Adeodatus, and fully per-

sualed that it would be impossible to separate him from her, she continually asked herself by what means she could remove this last and greatest obstacle.

A young man was then with Augustine whom we shall learn to know more intimately. His name was Alypius, and he was Augustine's dearest and most intimate friend, had been devoted to him in Africa, had rejoined him at Rome, and finding it unendurable without him, had followed him to Milan. Augustine had drawn him into his error, and he still adhered to it, but possessed a strong natural inclination toward virtue; and though in his youth he had been guilty of some faults, he had deeply repented of them, and thenceforward led a life of perfect chastity. He was constantly urging Augustine to imitate his example, describing with enthusiasm the joys of this austere and wholly spiritual life, which bestowed, in return for the sacrifices it demanded, a peace, liberty, and strength which are only found in the solitary contemplation of truth. Unfortunately such counsels seemed vain and empty to Augustine, to whom life appeared absolutely worthless, if unshared by her with whom he had now dwelt for fifteen years. "I thought I could not live if deprived of her affection; not knowing the strength with which God endows the chaste soul, I felt incapable of a single life. But Thou wouldst indeed have given me this strength, had I with hearty sighs knocked at Thy ears, and with a sound faith cast my care upon Thee."*

But, alas! he never gave a thought to this. "Being delighted with pestiferous pleasure, I drew my chain still after me, being afraid to be loosed from it, reject-

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. II.

ing all that could be said in praise of virtue, as the hand that would unchain me from the bondage I loved." *

It was evident that for such a malady there was but one remedy possible. Since Augustine felt himself unequal to the austere solitude of chastity, the proper state for him was a union blessed by God. St. Monica pondered this unceasingly, and fully persuaded that so soon as Augustine should have found rest in the legitimate and holy affection of marriage, his last difficulties would vanish, she earnestly prayed God to bring this to pass.

The simplest plan would have been for Augustine to marry the mother of Adeodatus. But although there is no precise evidence so to prove, this must have been impossible; for knowing the sufferings of Augustine in separating from her, it is evident that law, custom, or circumstances unknown to us, presented insurmountable obstacles to this union. Augustine was, therefore, in the painful position of being unable to dismiss her or espouse her. And mixed up with all this hesitation, disquietude, and delay, was the great question of his salvation.

Who realizes better and feels more acutely these things than a mother? Nevertheless, Monica never hesitated. Since the guilty attachment could not be purified, it must be broken; and the only way of rendering this tolerable to Augustine, was to hold out to him the prospect of a union worthy of him.

Probably she had recourse to the counsels and influence of Ambrose for aid in her difficult work, but it is

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XII.

certain that "she prayed with redoubled ardor; she importuned Thee with loud cries, that Thou wouldst be pleased to reveal to her what course to pursue in such a difficult and urgent matter."* The upshot of it was, that after having sought with care, she was fortunate enough to find in a Christian family a young girl who appeared to unite all the qualities which Monica most desired in the wife of her son. She then acquainted Augustine with her project, and entreated him to assent. He was overwhelmed with grief, but recognizing the necessity of the step, suffered his mother to proceed. She therefore asked the hand of the maiden on behalf of her son. A favorable answer was returned to her suit; but as the young girl was not yet of a marriageable age, with the stipulation that the union should not take place for two years. It is probable that this delay was approved of by both families, as it afforded Augustine time to prove his sincerity in his new belief.

However that may have been, it was evident that Augustine could not remain longer in his false, and now indelicate position. The separation was therefore urged upon him, and presently the sacrifice was accomplished.

St. Augustine has alluded briefly, but in the most expressive manner, to this separation: "I allowed her to be removed who had hitherto shared my existence, and my heart which had cleaved to her, being now torn away, as it were from her, was wounded and bled." † Further on he adds: "This wound would not heal, and for a long time caused me acute pain." ‡

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XIII.

† Ibid., Ch. XV.

‡ Ibid.

As for the mother of Adeodatus, it is easy to imagine her anguish and tears, although history is silent in reference to her. It is pleasing to us to learn, however, that after relinquishing her hold on the heart which had been devoted to her for so long a period, she was touched with divine grace, and forsaken by earthly affection, turned her thoughts to heaven, and retired to a convent to spend the remainder of her life in begging pardon of God for having enslaved such a heart, and retarded for fifteen years the glory which was to accrue to the Church through his genius. "She was better than I was," says St. Augustine, "inasmuch as she manifested a courage and generosity which I had not the strength to imitate." *

St. Monica thanked God from her inmost soul, and began to regard the future more hopefully. Had she not dearly purchased the right of believing that the passions of Augustine were now subdued, and that after such a sacrifice nothing would be able to delay him on the path of truth and virtue?

And at this period, a ray of peace did indeed penetrate his soul, as from a rift in the clouds between two tempests. Like a vessel relieved from its heavy load, the soul of Augustine regained its equilibrium. His mother was at his side, radiant with happiness; his friends were gathered about him and pursuing their philosophical researches with enthusiasm. Each day saw join them some compatriot of Augustine's, eager to greet his young master, or his old friend; Romanianus, whom tedious law-suits had brought to Milan, and who, ever faithful to the son of Patricius and Monica, placed

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XV.

his large fortune at Augustine's service; Alypius, whom we already know, and who having fixed his abode with Augustine, was destined to prove to him later so tender and consoling a friend; Nebridius, who had quitted Carthage, the vast domains of his father, his home, and even his mother, to give himself up to the study of philosophy. Younger than Augustine, but like him a prey to doubt, and grieved because of his doubts; possessed of a deep and acute intellect, Nebridius held a special place in Augustine's heart. Seven or eight others, chiefly from Africa, grouped themselves around Augustine, and devoted themselves to the same studies. They cultivated that of literature; discussed the loftiest questions in reference to God and the soul, and indulged in Utopian dreams; among which was the following: "Many of us friends," says St. Augustine, "weary of the troubles and vexations of life, had almost resolved to withdraw from the world, and live in quiet. Our plan was that each should bring in what he had to the common stock, where by sincerity of friendship, one should not claim this, and the other that; but the whole should belong to every one, and everything to all. There were about ten of us that were ready to join this society, amongst whom some were very rich, especially Romanianus, my fellow-townsmen, and familiar friend from my childhood, who was the most in earnest in this matter, and having much larger means than any of the rest, had the most power to promote it. It was agreed that two of us yearly, like magistrates, should take the management of affairs, and the rest being quiet and without trouble, should devote themselves to the pursuit of wisdom."*

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XIV.

Such was Augustine's dream,—the dream of all great souls from the earliest ages ; of Plato, of Socrates, of Pythagoras, of Cicero, of all who, at whatever period they may have lived, have experienced the longing, excited either by the natural greatness of their minds, or by disenchantment with the things of earth, to withdraw from the world, and devote themselves to the pursuit of wisdom.*

At length it appeared as if this beautiful vision, whose realization had been so often essayed, and as often proved impracticable, were about to be enjoyed. The friends were gathered together ; the master was in their midst, and funds were not lacking. "But," says Augustine, "when we began to consider what we should do as regards our wives, for many of us were married, the whole design, so well conceived, fell in pieces in our hands, was broken and thrown away, and we returned again to the sighs and groans of our miserable life!" †

Indeed, two things essential to the realization of this great idea, were lacking. This glorious republic, composed of chosen souls, who, having abandoned all desire for earthly things, are free to mount more easily into regions of light, must have its doors guarded by chastity, and its walls cemented by divine love. A few more years were to elapse, and then Augustine's dream was to be realized. The same friends should be grouped around him, and the young master would give the laws, and his *Rule* would be accepted in every part of the world, and form the admiration of all later generations. When St. Dominic, St. Gaëtan, and St. Francis of Sales wish to form similar societies, they will adopt St. Augustine's plan, constitution, and rule.

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XIV.

† Ibid.

But alas! How fragile is the human heart! how tyrannical its passions! Augustine had only just made to the new-born faith in his heart, the bitter sacrifice of leaving the mother of Adeodatus, and been rewarded by the dawn of light and peace within his soul, when, incredible as it may appear, he enchained himself anew. He had not the courage to wait two years for the maiden whom his mother had chosen for his wife, and who, in the solitude of a Christian life, was preparing herself to be the spouse of him on whom she had bestowed the first affections of her heart. A slave to sensuality, unable to plead this time in excuse the promptings of his heart, he entered into a new connection, the most shameful of all because it was dictated by the lowest motives, and was formed on the morrow of such a separation, and the eve of his marriage.

“ Unhappy I, impatient of delay, a slave of passion, procured me another, though no wife, to sustain and keep up, by the continuance of custom, that disease of my soul, till the time of my marriage arrived. Neither was the wound of mine healed that was caused by separation from my former companion, but after the most acute pains it had cost me, it became corrupt, and though the pain was deadened, it became a desperate sore.” *

Let us confess it, we can here only cover our faces and blush. Behold what human nature is when it separates itself from God. The loftiest and most penetrating intellect, the best and kindest heart, will not avail to save it from sinking to the lowest depths. And

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XV.

by some mysterious law of evil, as the mind of Augustine had first corrupted his heart, so now his corrupt heart darkens his mind again, thus forming a vicious circle which God alone can, and does, break.

Scarcely, in truth, had Augustine resumed his yoke than all his passions awakened. All that is vile in the human soul rose from its depths to the surface, and inspired him with thoughts utterly unlike any which we have hitherto heard him express. From the lofty heights—I do not say of his new-born faith—but from the lofty heights of Plato, he fell into the ignominy of Epicurus, and we hear him sighing after the grossest materialism. “I often discoursed with my friends Alypius and Nebridius, and declared that Epicurus above all men with me would carry away the prize. I said: ‘Supposing us to be immortal, and that we might live in the perpetual enjoyment of sensual pleasures, without any fear of ever losing them, would not this be enough to render us happy?’” * So low had this soul fallen, once lofty, noble, and filled with beautiful aspirations toward the infinite. It accepted materialism, and with perfect satisfaction, were materialism only eternal. “Nor was there anything that restrained me from sinking still deeper into the pit of carnal pleasures but the fear of death and of Thy judgment to come, which in all the vanity of my opinions never wholly departed from my breast.” †

Ah! we breathe again. The conscience of Augustine is still living. Nothing could destroy the admirable work of St. Monica. O teaching of a Christian mother, how powerful thou art, since at the depth of this awful

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XVI.

† Ibid.

abyss, thou art still able to protect the soul of Augustine.

Moreover, precisely because the fall had been so shameful, because the mind, the heart, and the senses had become tainted, Augustine became sadder and more agitated than ever. "Woe to the audacious soul, that, after departing from God, vainly hopes to find something better. She turns and re-turns on back and sides, but in vain; all is hard, and Thou alone her rest." * And again: "What torments I then endured Thou only knowest, and no human being; for what could I have said, or how could my tongue have expressed the whole tumult of my soul, to the ears even of my most intimate friends? But all my groanings were heard by Thee." † "Alas!" he goes on to say, "I sought for rest, but found none; or if, thinking I had found some place of repose, I said to myself: 'It is well with me; here will I stay'; Thou with secret goads didst stir me up that I might be uneasy, and my soul restored to health by the secret touch of Thy healing hand." ‡

That he was slowly recovering, in fact, was manifested by his deep sadness, the utter unsuccessfulness of his search for peace, and, let us add for the honor of Augustine, by the courage he manifested. His first sinful connection had lasted fifteen years; this one endured but a few months. It is probable that St. Monica once more intervened; that she wept as she had never wept before; that she counselled her erring son more tenderly than ever, and put forcibly before him the indelicacy and criminality of his conduct

* Confessions, Book VI., Ch. XVI.

† Confessions, Book VII., Ch. VII.

‡ Ibid., Ch. VIII.

toward the pious young girl whose hand had been solicited for him, and also in regard to Adeodatus, who was now growing up in angelic innocence, which he would perhaps lose in the contemplation of such deplorable weakness, and especially in relation to God, whose most precious graces he was despising, and whose wrath would surely descend upon him. Augustine finished by yielding to her arguments, and weary of seeking happiness in a gross and criminal connection which, moreover, never gave it him, he broke his chains, and promised his mother to await the time, now less distant, of his marriage.

God, who had recompensed the first sacrifice of Augustine by sending him a momentary peace and a ray of light, had prepared for his second a similar but more precious reward. Augustine had scarcely broken his bonds than the last shadows disappeared from his soul, and the full light of faith poured in upon it.

As our readers will recollect, the dawn had appeared there long before. As on a warm summer evening, after a storm, the stars begin to gleam forth one by one from amid the vanishing clouds, so for some time the great truths of faith had begun to rise one by one in the agitated soul of Augustine. He had conquered his doubts, or rather he had never succeeded in eradicating from his conscience his mother's teachings on the existence of God, on Providence, on the soul's immortality, on the distinction between good and evil, and on the last judgment. His progress from doubt to doubt and from error to error had taught him the impossibility of arriving at truth by his own efforts; the necessity of a divine teaching, the characteristics of such teaching, and its existence in the Catholic Church,

which he was beginning to view with admiration. These were the stars which shone in his soul with a still veiled, but calm and steadfast light.

But beautiful though they were, their light was not of itself sufficient to make Augustine a Christian, for the most brilliant luminary, the true Light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world, had not yet risen on the horizon of his soul. Not that Augustine had entirely forgotten Him. He had drunk in His name too lovingly from his mother's lips ever to forget it; but perusal of bad books, pernicious teachings, and the sway of passion, had conjured up a mist which rendered the divine figure of the Man-God singularly dim to his mental sight. He could not comprehend the Incarnation, nor the Redemption, nor the Divinity of Christ; nay, the very existence of the Word and the spirituality of God had become problems for him.

In the ages of antiquity, in the most brilliant period of Greek history, lived a young man possessing a mind whose loftiness is almost incredible, and a beauty of language which has never been surpassed. A disciple of Socrates, whom he immortalized by lending him his own wings; the master of Aristotle, whose power he would have increased threefold if he could but have succeeded in communicating to him his fire; at the very first regard which he threw upon the universe, he comprehended that it was only an image, a symbol, a shadow, and erected his philosophy on this basis, that behind the visible world there is an invisible one that contains the explanation of the former, which is its type. From his second gaze he learned something still more beautiful. Mounting from man to God, and dis-

cerning with singular clearness the link between the two, he reasoned that man proceeds from and returns to God, but that in his short sojourn here he is not separated from God, but, to quote his own sublime expression, remains attached, and as if suspended from God by the root, and that however sad may be his lot upon earth, he possesses within his heart a force sufficient to enable him to reascend to the heaven whence he has descended, and that this force is his perception of God, his need of God, and his aspiration toward Him. This Plato terms the sense of the Divine, and it forms together with the sense of the invisible, the true basis of his philosophy, or rather, of all philosophy worthy of man's study.

After Plato had gained this insight, he journeyed among the nations of antiquity, visited their sanctuaries, consulted their priests, grown hoary in the study of tradition, had himself initiated into their mysteries, discovered and restored changed creeds; and having gained fresh strength from fresh knowledge, resumed his flight, and soared so high that he has left the Fathers of the Church uncertain what name to give him; some terming him the Pagan Moses, a prophet inspired by God, an angelic messenger sent to the nations sitting in the shadow of death, but all agreeing in saluting him with the name of Plato the divine.

Augustine had never read Plato, his limited knowledge of Greek having prevented him, but he had learned some of Plato's ideas through Cicero. At the moment when he was struggling with the last of the objections which the Manicheans had aroused in his mind, and endeavoring to comprehend God as a pure spirit, for until then he had conceived of Him as a mingling of matter

and spirit, one of his friends brought him a translation of Plato, which had just been published at Rome by a well-known rhetorician named Victorinus.

Augustine took the book, and had hardly opened it before the bandage which heresy had placed upon his eyes, fell from them, and he was able to comprehend the pure spirituality of God, and the existence of the Word.

It was not the Gospel which he read, to be sure, but a sort of human preface to it, penned by one who had reached the highest state of purely human development, and so beautiful that Augustine was dazzled by it.

“At that time there fell into my hands a book, to use an expression of one of the ancients, all redolent with the most exquisite perfumes of Araby; scarcely was I conscious of the same, when so soon as a few drops of it fell upon the tiny flame lately kindled in my heart, it was suddenly all aglow with a fire impossible for you, Romanianus, to comprehend, or for me to describe. Honors, worldly grandeur, glory, the charms and attractions of this terrestrial life, all paled before the flood of light which now began to inundate my soul.”*

But we must permit himself to relate in detail his happy discoveries, still mingled with obscurities; however, which will require the light of another revelation, and learn from him how certain souls are prepared for the reception of Christianity: “In these books I read, not indeed in the same words, but with a striking identity of meaning, and that confirmed with a great variety of reasons, that, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and

* *Contra Acad.*, Book II., No. 5.

the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.' And that the soul of man, though it bear witness of the light, yet is not itself the light, but the Word of God is 'the true light that enlighteneth every man coming into the world; that the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.' This I read in those books. This is, we perceive, the sublime beginning of the Gospel of St. John. *In principio erat Verbum.* 'But that He came to His own, and that to them who received Him He gave power to become the sons of God'; this I read not there."

"Again, I read there that God the Word was born not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, neither of the will of the flesh, but of God. But that this Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, I did not read there."

"Also, I discovered in those books, and that frequently repeated, and expressed in divers ways, that the Son is in the form of the Father, and thinks it not robbery to be equal with God, because He is of the same nature with Him. But that He debased Himself, taking on Him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, and humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to the death of the cross; this I found not in these writings."

"That Thy only-begotten Son, begotten before all times, remains unchangeably co-eternal with Thee, and that, in order that they may be happy, souls must re-

ceive of His fullness, and that to be wise, they must participate in His self-subsisting Wisdom ; this I found there. But that, in due time, He died for the wicked ; that Thou, my God, didst not spare Thy only-begotten Son, but gavest Him up for us all, is not to be found there. For Thou hast hidden these things from the wise, and hast revealed them to the little ones, that Thou mightest comfort them that mourn and are heavy laden, and lead in the paths of righteousness those who are meek and humble of heart."

That is to say, Augustine, in reading the works of Plato, although he found not the infinite love and humiliation of the Word written therein, found nevertheless His glory, His eternal genesis, His radiation through all souls, whose true Light He is, recorded upon their pages. He was charmed. Some of the joy which he had experienced at nineteen years of age, in reading Cicero's " Hortensius," returned to him, but deeper and purer, because he was now freer from sensuality, and also because Plato mounts higher, and carries souls to a loftier height, than does Cicero. " I entered within myself," he says, meaning that he penetrated into those secret recesses of his soul which he had not dared to enter at the age of nineteen, " and at once saw the light ; not this common light which is visible to all flesh, nor any greater light of the same kind, only clearer and brighter, but a light wholly different. Who knoweth the truth, knoweth this light," he exclaims, " and he who knoweth this light, knoweth eternity. It is discernible to one eye alone, for it is charity that knoweth it." *

" O eternal truth," he cries, deeply moved by this

* Confessions, Book VII., Ch. X.

dawning of true light; "O true charity! O lovely eternity! Thou art my God; for Thee I sigh day and night."

"But, alas!" he resumes humbly, "when I strove to know Thee, I became conscious of two things: that there was much to be seen, and that I was as yet incapable of seeing. So clearly did I perceive these two things that I thrilled with desire and fear, and found that I was at so vast a distance from Thee in those lower regions where my sins had plunged me that discouragement would have seized me, had I not heard Thy voice saying to me: 'Courage; I am the food of the strong; grow thou up, and thou shalt feed upon Me. But I shall not be converted into thee like thy corporal food, but thou shalt be changed into Me.'"

And later, when new anxieties preyed upon his heart, he heard the same voice speaking to him with singular authority: "I am that I am." "I heard this voice," says St. Augustine, "not in my mind, but my heart." All my doubts vanished, and I could rather have doubted my own existence, than question a truth so patent to the eyes of the soul.*

Here we have a striking example of the manner in which truth is born in the soul. After prolonged search, the perusal of many books, anxious discussion with oneself, and others, all at once, on the morrow of a sacrifice, without any human being contributing to bring it about, all objections vanish like a wind that dies away; the clouds part, and truth appears in the soul. We marvel that any doubt could ever have entered our soul, so clear is everything now; and when this light

*Confessions, Book VII., Ch. V.

and this peace have succeeded to the blackest night, and long and cruel uncertainty, the rapture experienced is unending.

But this first illumination, though very vivid, was not sufficient, for it revealed, if I may so speak, only a portion of the divine physiognomy of Jesus Christ. Augustine had read in the works of Plato, of the purely spiritual nature of God, and of the existence of His Word; but had failed to find therein aught of the love and abasement of the Word Incarnate. The latter had risen to the conception of a God, invisible, glorious, and separate from all creatures; and comprehended even through the dazzling radiance of the divine nature, something of the Divine nature itself; a Light proceeded from a Light, and equal to It. These were grand perceptions; so grand that we ask how any human genius unaided, could ever have arrived at them, and if Plato be not only giving expression to the unerring echo of antique tradition. But a God, poor, humiliated, abased to the level of man, and through love of man; a God loving creatures so deeply as to suffer and die for them, was what neither Plato, nor Socrates, nor Cicero, nor Virgil, ever suspected. Such things could only be conceived by the heart that has been capable of realizing them.

Therefore, it needed that a greater and holier than Plato should come to Augustine's aid, in order that his mind, and especially his heart, should be disposed to receive such astounding mysteries.

Guided invisibly by the same merciful hand which had led him back from his long and weary wanderings, Augustine opened the Epistles of St. Paul. He did this tremblingly, and in spite of singular agitation and

repugnance, as if he had a presentiment of the sacrifices which the reading of them would wring from him. "I felt myself constrained," he says, "to turn my eyes toward that holy religion which had been so profoundly imprinted on my soul when I was a child; but I hesitated and wavered, although I felt the force of its attraction. At last, in a state of restless uncertainty, willing and not willing, it was with a feverish and trembling hand I seized St. Paul's Epistles." *

God was awaiting Augustine within their pages. "The greatest doctor," says Flechier, "must needs be the conquest of the greatest apostle." Moreover, St. Paul is the theologian of the Word Incarnate. Were it not for St. John's prior claim, he would even bear that name. But it is very singular that he who reposed in the Saviour's breast, in the intimacy and love of earthly life, should have so insisted upon the majesty of the Word Incarnate, and that he who on the road to Damascus, and later in the ravishment of the third heaven, was, to use his own strong expression, oppressed by His glory, should have, above all, insisted upon His abasement. A persecutor of Christ before becoming His apostle, St. Paul has illumined the abysses of the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Redemption, with a light so intense as to dazzle the mental sight; treating of them with an energy of faith and of language which causes a sort of bewilderment in the mind which is not prepared for it. But when, by dint of reperusing him, we grow gradually accustomed to his faulty and abrupt phrases, we are overwhelmed with admiration. St. Paul is surpassed neither by David, nor Isaiah, nor even St

* *Contra Acad.*, Book II., No. 5.

John; and because none appreciated more justly the depth of man's fall, since his heart was seething with hatred and desire to persecute, when God cast him to the ground, no one has painted more magnificently the necessity of man's redemption by the abasements, death, and sufferings of a God.

At the very first lines Augustine was struck with admiration. "O didst thou but know," he wrote to Romanianus, "what light suddenly broke in upon me, not only would I have liked to show it to thee who hast so desired this sight, but to that cruel enemy of thine who has so long hunted thee from tribunal to tribunal, seeking thy goods. And certainly did he see it as I see it, he would renounce all—gardens, houses, banquets, all that entices him now, and as a faithful, gentle lover would fly enraptured toward this beauty."

This was only Augustine's first look; the second taught him much more.

He beheld the veil withdrawing from a grand mystery whose existence he had never until now suspected, and of which Plato was wholly ignorant, and consequently unable to guide him in the path of virtue; which the Manicheans had endeavored to resolve into the doctrine of two principles, but vainly, and which St. Paul alone showed to him with dazzling light. He learned that man is no longer in the state in which God formed him; that he had been created holy, innocent, filled with light and intelligence, made to perceive the majesty of God, and already perceiving it; but that, overcome by his glory, he fell into presumption, desired to make himself independent of God, and his own centre, and that he has been abandoned, blinded, driven far from God, and is in such a state of corruption that

sin dwells in him ; that there abides within him a miserable, odious creature, an enemy of truth, incapable of virtue, prone to evil ; the man of sin, as St. Paul in one place calls it, and in another, " the old man " ; fantastic expressions, profoundly sad, but also sublimely hopeful, for they indicate that this is not the whole of man, that there abides in him a new creature likewise. And this is what Augustine's reading taught him presently, and that it was in order to conquer this " old man," this hideous mingling of pride, concupiscence, and revolt, that the Word was made flesh, and lived a life of humility, obedience, and sacrifice, demeaning himself to the level of man to atone for man's sin in desiring to exalt himself to the level of God. The whole mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption unveiled itself to his eyes, and overwhelmed him with admiration. He felt that he had passed into space, beyond the limit of all human conceptions ; that he had reached that sublime point where man vanishes and God appears, and bowed himself down in awe. " Ah ! " he exclaims, with astonishment, " how wide the difference between the works of the philosophers and those of God's ambassadors ! All that is good in the former is to be found in the latter, besides the knowledge of Thy grace, O my God, so that he who knows Thee may not only cease his self-glorying, but may be healed, strengthened, and attain to Thee."

" Moreover, what do these great philosophers know of this law of sin incarnate in our members, which struggles with the law of the mind, making us slaves to sin ? What know they of the grace of Jesus Christ, that innocent victim, whose blood has effaced the decree of our condemnation ? On these points all their books

are silent. There we neither learn the secret of Christian piety, nor the tears of penitence, nor the sacrifice of an humble and contrite heart, much less the grace flowing from the precious chalice which contains the price of our redemption. We seek there in vain for these canticles. O my soul, submit thyself to thy God, for He is thy God, thy Saviour, and thy Protector. Leaning on Him, what hast thou to fear? Nor this sweet invitation: 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will refresh you.' These wise ones of earth know not that the Incarnate Word is meek and lowly of heart. Divine mysteries, which Thou, my God, hast hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to the humble and little ones."*

These were the truths which sank into the heart of Augustine during his perusal of him who calls himself the "least of the apostles," and the revelation of such marvels overwhelmed him with admiration. "Oh!" he exclaims, in closing the book, "it is one thing to see afar off from the summit of a wild rock the city of peace without being able to attain it, do what you may, and another to find the way and be possessed of a guide who will lead you thither, and defend you from those who would arrest you in your course."†

From this we learn that the last shadows were departing from the soul of Augustine; the ice in his heart was melting; tenderness of heart had returned with the light of faith; the shores of his true country, so long hidden from his sight by the mists of error, were beginning to reveal themselves to his gaze, and it was easy to foresee that soon he would tread its soil in all the glory of repentance.

* Confessions, Book VII., Ch. XXI.

† Ibid.

CHAPTER XII.

LAST ANXIETIES OF ST. MONICA IN BEHOLDING AUGUSTINE
HESITATE, NOT THROUGH LACK OF LIGHT, BUT THROUGH
FEAR OF VIRTUE'S EXACTIONS—THIS INCOMPARABLE
MOTHER'S TEARS ARE AT LENGTH CHANGED INTO TEARS
OF JOY—CONVERSION OF AUGUSTINE.

BEHOLD Augustine at length in possession of the light for which he has so long sighed, and which his mother had solicited for him with so many tears; the bandage had at last been stripped from his eyes, and it seemed as if the only thing to do was to rise, run to his mother, and say to her, "Weep no more, I am a Christian."

But Augustine was not yet prepared to take this decisive step. The light had rather pierced the clouds than dissipated them. Augustine still retained a multitude of false or inaccurate ideas, which he found it no small trouble to rid himself of; the last shadows disappeared but slowly.

They would have vanished more rapidly if Augustine had but had courage to kneel, strike his breast, and prepare himself to receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist; for there is a time in the search after truth when an act of humility and abandonment to the will of God will alone obtain more light. We must be ready to sacrifice everything to procure the disappearance of this darkness. God puts His favors at this price.

Augustine realized this vaguely, but he was afraid. He desired to see more clearly before falling on his knees, while to his seeing clearly it was essential that he should be prostrate; and in the meantime he multiplied his studies and his readings, in order to increase the light which had already dawned upon him.

St. Monica, who was assisting in anxiety, despite her happiness, at this new birth, would have liked to hasten its consummation. How many times, at the foot of the altar, at her communions, did she entreat God to finish His work, and to take possession, were it by force, of her son's soul. How often did she pour out to St. Ambrose her growing hope, and learned from him to manifest in her relations with Augustine, who was pining for light, the same delicacy, patience, and sweetness with which we treat a tenderly-loved patient. How often, confident of her son's progress, must she have urged him, saying: Come, decide; you believe now; why do you not act?

Why did he not act? Alas! he tells, himself, humbly why he did not act; it was because he lacked the two wings which are requisite for mounting to virtue, or even sustaining oneself in the region of light—humility, which is the wing of the mind, and purity, which is the wing of the heart.

“I was assured of all the truths of faith, but was yet too weak to enjoy them, for I was eaten up by pride, vanity, and conceit. Though full of my misery, I wished to pass for learned, and instead of bewailing my crimes, was puffed up with vain science.”* And because he was not humble, the full sublimity of Jesus

* Confessions, Book VII., Ch. XX.

remained still hid from him. "For I did not then as yet apprehend my most humble Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, neither did I comprehend the deep mysteries of His weakness. For Thy word, the Eternal Truth, which soars far above the loftiest works of Thy creation, raiseth up to Himself those that are subject to Him, and in these lower regions He has made to Himself an humble abode, so that He may bring down the loftiness of those whom He would have as His subjects, so that beholding at their feet the divinity made weak, by taking upon Himself the vestment of our flesh, they being wearied might cast themselves down on Him, that so He arising might raise them up also."*

And now Augustine had developed one of the wings by which to mount to God through Jesus Christ. But the other was still lacking, for though he had broken the grossest and most criminal of his sensual bonds, he still bore many a wound within his heart. Let us listen to his own recitals; they evince even a deeper humility than those we have already perused: "I now began to love Thee, O my God, and was filled with delight; but I did not stand still to enjoy Thee, but was one while strongly attracted to Thee by Thy beauty, and then presently hurried away from Thee by my own weight, and I fell down, groaning among those things below Thee, even by the weight of my own sinful habits and passions. But I did not wholly forget Thee, nor doubt that Thou wert He to whom I should cling, though as yet I was not in that state in which I could adhere to Thee, for the corruption of the flesh weighed

* Confessions, Book VII., Ch. XVIII.

down my soul, and the earthly dwelling pressed down the mind that was desirous of soaring aloft." *

But even though Augustine did not possess the divine wings in perfection, he already began to mount to the light. Often he winged his flight past created things, mounting from degree to degree, from ladder to ladder, from the world of bodies to that of souls, from that to the angel world, until he pierced all veils and arrived at that Being of whom even lightning-like glimpses fill us with trembling awe. "But, alas!" he says, "I could not fix my eye, and falling to the earth by reason of my weakness, I carried nothing away with me but a memory enamored of Thee, and regret that I could not enjoy at my leisure those meats whose fragrance I had discerned." †

However, as this light increased, the voice of Augustine's conscience waxed stronger accordingly. More vehemently than ever did it urge him, murmuring in his heart those words which grew stronger and stronger until they sounded like thunder in his ears. "Hitherto thou hast pleaded thy uncertainty as to the truth as thy excuse for not fulfilling thy duty. Now all is clear; the truth shines before thy eyes. Why dost thou still hesitate?" "I heard," says St. Augustine, "but I heeded not; I refused to advance, though not able to make any excuse. My pretexts were now exhausted and confuted, and there remained only a dumb fear and apprehension, dreading to be restrained from that desperate course which I had hitherto pursued." ‡

Long had been the time during which Augustine had

* Confessions, Book VII., Ch. XVII.

† Ibid.

‡ Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. VII.

lacked courage to believe ; now he believed, but lacked courage to put his belief into practice. The obscurities of the Faith had first deterred him ; now it was the exactions of virtue which terrified him. "I had found that good pearl which was to be bought by selling all that I had, and this I demurred to do."*

Indecisive and agitated, urged by his mother, and tormented by his conscience, Augustine resolved to consult a holy priest named Simplician, whose beautiful life had for a long time impressed him with admiration. Simplician was one of those venerable old men constantly to be met with in the bosom of the Catholic Church, who having passed from a chaste youth to a ripe and chaster age, present to men who yield it reverence when they meet it, a beautiful image of peace in virtue. Young men, especially, whose hearts are troubled by the storms of passion, love to draw near these tranquil ones, snow-crowned by age, in the hope of acquiring calmness from contact with them.

To Simplician accordingly Augustine went, to confide to him the troubles of life, and the secret weaknesses which held him back, not in presence of the light, but in presence of virtue.

The holy old man received him with a sweet smile, listened without astonishment to the recital of his wanderings, and felicitated him upon having devoted himself to the study of Plato and Socrates, who elevate the mind and heart, rather than to the perusal of the works of atheists and materialists. Simplician, like all old priests, possessed a wide knowledge of men and things. He was intimately acquainted, not only with

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. I.

St. Ambrose, whose youth he had directed and whose baptism he had administered, but with a large number of philosophers, poets, Roman rhetoricians, and in particular with Victorinus, who had translated the works of Plato, which Augustine was at this very time studying. Also, in common with all old men, did Simplician love to recount his experiences, and being possessed of all the observation and influencing manner of a man of the world, knew how to adroitly administer a lesson along with an anecdote.

Seeing before him a young man with so fine a mind and noble character, whose pathway was already illumined by divine grace, but who hesitated to yield himself to its guidance, he profited by the former's mention of the name of Victorinus to say that he had known this eloquent man formerly in Rome; and then, to indicate to Augustine in an indirect manner the road of courage and Christian honor, he related the following facts concerning him.

Victorinus had become illustrious in the same career which Augustine was pursuing. As a professor of eloquence, he had seen about his chair not only all the Roman youth, but a throng of senators. He had translated, explained, and enriched with luminous commentaries, the most beautiful writings of antique philosophy, and his eloquence had obtained for him the rare honor of a statue in the Forum. After he had exhausted the study of all the masterpieces of the human mind, he conceived the idea of examining the Holy Scriptures. He read them attentively; then said to Simplician, but in the privacy of friendship, "Knowest thou that I am a Christian?" "I will not believe it," answered Simplician, "until I see thee in the Church of Christ." Whereupon

Victorinus laughed, and said, sarcastically, "Is it the walls, then, that make the Christian?" In reality, he was afraid of alienating his friends, dreading lest these cedars of Libanus, which God had not yet broken into pieces, might fall upon him and crush him.

In the meantime, he continued to read and pray much, and gradually courage and strength filled his heart, until at last a day came when he feared more to be denied by Jesus Christ than to be mocked at and despised by his friends, and trembling lest he might betray the truth, went to Simplician and said to him, "Let us go to the church; I desire to be made a Christian!" Rome was filled with astonishment, and the Church with deepest joy.

When the moment arrived to make profession of faith in presence of all the faithful, they suggested to Victorinus that he make his in private, as was customary in the case of those whom the public solemnity terrified. But he energetically refused, and courageously mounted the ambon.* As soon as he appeared, his name was passed from mouth to mouth, and elicited a murmur of joy from the whole assembly, which waxed stronger and stronger until at length was heard distinctly: "Victorinus! Victorinus!" The desire of hearing him, however, speedily restored silence; and then Victorinus recited the creed with admirable faith, so that all the faithful who were present were deeply consoled by his courage, and thenceforth accorded him a place in their hearts; and their joy and love were as the two hands which enshrined him therein.

* Ambon—an oblong pulpit whose use was discontinued in the Church after the 14th century.—WEBSTER.

“Since then,” concluded Simplician, accentuating each of his words, “this illustrious man has found his glory in being a child in the school of Jesus Christ. He has humbly submitted himself to the guidance of the Holy Church, and carried the crown of thorns upon the head which wore so many wreaths of victory. Julian the Apostate, having forbidden Christians the profession of letters, he closed his eloquent lips and crowned his life by the most beautiful and painful of sacrifices.”*

This well-chosen instance, so perfectly suited to his present position, moved Augustine to the inmost depths of his being. He went away filled with enthusiasm, reproaching himself for his weakness and cowardice, and by the time he had reached home—where his mother was awaiting him in prayer—he was fully resolved to end the struggle by imitating Victorinus at once. “O my God!” he exclaimed, in a species of transport, “come to mine aid! Act, O Lord; stir us up, and call us back; kindle and rejoice our hearts; breathe forth Thy fragrance and become sweet to us; let us love and run after Thee.”†

But, alas! the chain which Augustine had dragged for so many years was heavier than he had at first imagined. Though he raised his hand to do so, he could not find strength to break it. He had ceased to say “No,” but could not bring himself to say “Yes.” “This course of corruption and of evil habits formed a chain which kept me close shackled in cruel slavery. I did, indeed, desire to serve God with noble and chaste love, and to enjoy Him alone; but this new will was not yet strong enough to overcome the other, which

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. II.

† Ibid., Ch. V.

had been strengthened by the long force of habit. Thus there were two wills of mine—the one old, the other new; the one carnal, the other spiritual,—and these two strove together with one another, and divided my soul.”*

Meanwhile he strove to soothe his conscience, and when it said to him that he must decide, answered like an indolent and sleepy man: “Presently; by and by; stay a little.” But “presently” did not come presently; and the “stay a little” was extended to a long time.†

It may be readily imagined that this visit of Augustine to the holy priest Simplician had aroused hope in St. Monica. Such a step, at such a moment, seemed equivalent to a conversion. For she did not doubt that the holy old man would succeed in making Augustine perform the final act, which, truth to tell, the latter would himself have been rejoiced to accomplish. So, when she saw Augustine still remaining in the same indecisive state after the visit as before, she was greatly discouraged. Her only consolation was that he still suffered, grew more and more agitated, and more assiduous than ever in his attendance at church, and spent all the time that he could spare from the preparations of his lectures in reading the writings of St. Paul.‡

Such was the state of affairs when an old friend of Augustine, named Pontitianus, came to visit him. Both were from Africa, where they had known each other formerly. But, while Augustine had passed into error and forgetfulness of God, Pontitianus had re-

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. V.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid., Ch. VI.

mained a fervent Christian, living at Milan, where he held one of the first military posts at the imperial court. St. Monica had been delighted to meet him again in Italy, and introduce into the society of Augustine, Alypius, Nebridius, and all the other young men unsettled in their religious belief, a man so strong and steadfast in his faith, whom neither the temptations of a court nor of a soldier's life had been able to overcome.

During his visit, while talking with Augustine and Alypius, Pontitianus observed a book lying on a billiard-table, and opened it mechanically, as one is apt to do when engaged in conversation. But instead of finding it to be, as he would have expected, a work of either Cicero or Quintilian, he was amazed to perceive the Epistles of St. Paul.* He looked at Augustine and smiled, whereupon the latter admitted that for some time he had perused the Holy Scriptures with the greatest attention and delight. The conversation then became of a decidedly Christian character.

Pontitianus had been a great traveller. He knew Gaul, Italy, Spain, Africa, Egypt, and knew them in their Christian aspect; that is to say, he had everywhere studied the marvels wrought by the Catholic Church. Amongst these none were more impressive than the development of virginity, charity, and the religious life, which had hallowed the ground of the Egyptian deserts and the Thebaïd. Along the borders of the Nile, in the heart of Egypt, where antiquity had concealed its horrors, a troop of virgins had appeared, who were living like angels in mortal bodies, displaying, beneath the burning sky of an enervating climate, the divinest

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. VI.

energy in the pure love and service of God. There were to be found those who had fled from the world in contempt for its vanities, in disgust with its corruption, and horror of its baseness and cowardice, and who desired to give their lives in sacrifice ; spotless virgins ; mothers who could not be consoled because their children were not ; doctors and philosophers versed in all the antique science of the schools of Alexandria, yet thirsting for silence and humility ; soldiers who had traversed the world and not found God ; confessors of the faith, and martyrs for truth, who, having escaped, bleeding, from their instruments of torture, had gone thither to renew their courage in the refreshing waters of prayer and penitence ; in all, a prodigious number. On Mount Nitrius alone there were five thousand. At the distance of half a day's march further within the desert, at a place called Cella, were to be found two thousand more. Besides these there were ten thousand under the government of St. Serapion, and nearly as many under that of St. Macarius. St. Pacomius, who had just died, had left seven thousand in the solitudes of Tabennus, and at the annual reunion of his Congregation-general, the monasteries which followed his rule had sent thither fifty thousand. The very cities were inundated with these holy souls. At Ancyra there were ten thousand virgins, and in 356 a traveller found in the city of Oxyrinka alone twenty thousand virgins consecrated to God.

These marvels, so long unknown, were now beginning to astonish the world, and arouse the enthusiasm of Christian hearts. St. Athanasius had just written the wonderful life of St. Antony, that giant of the desert ; and the lives of the most illustrious patriarchs

of the Thebaïd, Paul, Hilarion, Pacomius, Macarius, were then in course of preparation by men whose own lives were marvels of sanctity, St. Jerome, St. Epiphanius, and St. Ephrem.

All this was new to Augustine. Like so many men who pass by the Catholic Church and perceive her not, he had lived thirty years in Africa, and at the very doors of Alexandria, without even having heard of St. Antony, or the solitaries, or the virgins, or any of those admirable works by which the Church proves that she is the true Spouse of Jesus Christ. He did not even know that there in Milan, beneath his very eyes, there was a throng of virgins dwelling in angelic purity, for whom Ambrose had composed three books "On Virgins," and his admirable "Treatise on Virginité." Therefore he hung upon the lips of Pontitianus during the latter's recital. "We were astonished," he says, "to hear of these miracles, so well attested, and of such recent occurrence—almost in our own day—wrought in the true faith and the Catholic Church; indeed, we were all surprised to hear such marvels, and he to find that they were unknown to us." *

But if these marvels had taken place unperceived by Augustine, they had nevertheless rejoiced the Church and proved her divinity, by demonstrating what potent spirit animated her; for even, as formerly, the blood of martyrs had been the seed of Christians, so now it was virginity and the perfumes of the desert which furnished the Church with apostles, heroes, and doctors.

Pontitianus was aware of a beautiful instance of this, which the silent curiosity of his friends incited him to

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. VI.

relate : "Once when the court was at Trèves, in the interior of Gaul, and the emperor was one afternoon attending the sports of the circus, Pontitianus, in company with three companions, happened to stroll out into the gardens close to the city wall. On their way, they split into two parties, and while he and another went their own way, the other two came upon a cottage, which they were induced to enter. It was the abode of certain recluses, 'poor in spirit, of whom is the kingdom of heaven,' and here they found the life of St. Antony. One of them began to peruse it. His heart thrilled with admiration of it. The desire of quitting the world, of embracing so beautiful a life, seized him. Love of God and holy shame awoke within him. He grew angry with himself, and looked at his friend, saying, 'Tell me, I pray thee, whither do our aspirations tend? What do we seek? For whom do we fight? For what do we hope? To be friends and favorites of the emperor? And then, how fickle is fortune! What perils await us! Whereas, if I wish to become the friend and favorite of God, I may become so at once and forever.' He said this, and laboring in travail of a new life, his heart was agitated, the waves thereof rolled to and fro, but at last he gained the victory, and wholly God's, said to his friend, 'All is over; I have bidden a final adieu to worldly hopes, and am now bent on serving God, and to begin from this very hour.' His friend applauded his determination; both of them resolved on quitting the world; they left all to erect the tower that led to God.

"By this time Pontitianus and those of the party who had continued with him, arrived on the scene, and

minded the others of returning home, as the day was far spent. He then learned what had happened, as also their determination to dedicate themselves to God's service. They entreated Pontitianus and his companions, if they would not follow their example, at least to refrain from opposing them; and the former accordingly withdrew, bewailing themselves, but piously congratulating them, and recommending themselves to their prayers. And so one party returned to the palace with hearts weighed down to earth, while the other, with hearts raised heavenwards, remained in the cottage. The latter were betrothed; but they to whom they were affianced, on hearing of these things, also consecrated their virginity to God." *

Pontitianus was so engrossed with his subject that he failed to note the effect of his recital on Augustine. So long as he dwelt on the marvels of innocence, purity, austerity, and courage which hallowed the desert, Augustine had calmly given the story his applause; but when the other depicted the two officers quitting all for God, when his lips gave utterance to the impressive words, "What do we? What do we desire? To be friends of the emperor? What will this avail us? Why not rather become friends of God?" he heard the voice of his conscience more clearly than ever. "Whilst Pontitianus was speaking," he says, "I was overwhelmed with remorse and confusion at the sight of my ugliness, deformity, spots, stains, and ulcers. The more I admired the chaste beauty of the chaste lives just depicted, the greater became my self-abhorrence. So many years, more than twelve, squandered since I

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. VI.

had been stirred up, in the nineteenth year of my age, upon reading Cicero's 'Hortensius,' to the study of wisdom, and yet I still delayed to sacrifice worldly felicity to the pursuit of that happiness, the very search after which was to be preferred to the finding of treasures, kingdoms, and the voluptuous enjoyments of the world. Long ago I pleaded darkness as my excuse, but now that light had dawned, conscience exclaimed: 'What dost thou now, that thou art excuseless, that all is certain? Though oppressed by the vanity of earthly things, many a less ardent and anxious seeker for truth has outstripped thee in the heavenward race.'* "Thus was I inwardly corroded," adds St. Augustine, "and extremely confounded with a horrible shame, my countenance sharing in the trouble of my soul, whilst Pontitianus was relating these things."† At length Pontitianus departed. Augustine's agitation had completely mastered him. As for St. Monica, whether it was that she had assisted at this interview, or that her maternal heart had divined the anguish which was consuming her son, or that she was advised of it by Alypius, or perhaps by God Himself, she withdrew to her chamber at this supreme moment, and falling on her knees, wrestled in prayer with all the ardor of her saintly, maternal heart, for the soul of her child which was engaged in its last struggle with its God.‡

When Augustine found himself alone with Aly-

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. VII.

† Ibid.

‡ This tradition is put forth in nearly all the Augustinian Liturgies, and in the greater number of the works composed in honor of their Father, by the different Orders which follow the Rule of St. Augustine. The Rev. Father Louis of the Angels, Augustinian Hermit, mentions this as a fact (*Della Vita e*

pius he turned upon him a troubled look, and said "What is this we suffer? Hast thou not heard? The unlearned take heaven by force, and we with all our learning, cowardly and heartless, see how we still wallow in flesh and blood. Are we ashamed to follow them? or rather, ought we not to be more ashamed that we have not the courage to do the like?"* And then he left the spot and Alypius without waiting for an answer. The latter had been regarding him with astonishment—his manner was wholly unlike what it usually was, and his forehead, cheeks, eyes, and tone of voice revealed the condition of his mind even more clearly than had his words. Near the house was a little garden. "Thither," says St. Augustine, "this tumult of my breast carried me, where none might interrupt the hot conflict in which I was engaged with myself. I withdrew thither with Alypius, for the presence of so dear a friend did not destroy my privacy. We sat down as far as possible from the house. I groaned in spirit, angry at myself with a most violent indignation, because I had not yet submitted myself to Thy will, O my God, nor yet entered into league with Thee, toward whom all the powers of my soul urged me, bidding me take courage. I suffered and was tormented by my bitter self-accusations, struggling with my fetters until I had snapped their last feeble link, saying to myself,

Laudi del S. D. August., Lib. II., Ch. V.), and the Rev. Father Archangelo of the Presentation, barefooted Carmelite, mentions it in several passages in his multitudinous and learned works on St. Augustine. (Comment. in Confess., edit. Florent., 1757, op. et studio F. Archangeli a Præsentatione, Carmel, exalceati.)

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. VIII.

‘Courage, courage; let us not delay.’ And my heart was inclined to obey; I was on the point of acting, and yet acted not, and the nearer the crisis approached, when my whole being would be transformed, the greater became my alarm.”*

“And these trifles of trifles, and vanities of vanities, my old friends, pulled me by the garment of flesh, softly whispering, ‘Wilt thou then forsake us? and from this moment shall we no more be with thee, and thou be no longer allowed to do this or that forever?’ And what things they suggested to me, under what I call this or that, do Thou in Thy mercy efface from my soul. What filth, what infamy did they suggest!”†

“But they no longer boldly confronted me as heretofore, but timid mutterings behind me, pulling me by my garment to oblige me to look back at them. And the violence of evil custom said to me, ‘Canst thou live without such things as these?’

“But this was now said very faintly, for in the direction whither I turned my eyes, I beheld the chaste dignity of Continnence serenely and modestly, cheerful, kindly enticing me to come forward and to fear nothing, and stretching forth her loving hands to receive and embrace me, full of beautiful examples of boys and girls, a multitude of young men and maidens, persons of all ages, grave widows, and virgins, who had attained old age. And in all these Continnence herself was not barren, but a fruitful mother of children; that is, of chaste delights from Thee, O Lord, her heavenly bridegroom.

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. X. and XI.

† Ibid., Ch. XI.

She seems to laugh at me with a kind of derision, by way of alluring me on, as if she had said, 'And art not thou able to do what these youths and maidens do? or are these able in themselves, and not in the Lord their God? Thou leanest upon thyself, and therefore thou dost not stand. Throw thyself upon Him; fear not, He will not withdraw Himself to let thee fall.'”*

“And I was exceedingly ashamed that I should still hear the whispers of those vanities, and hang in suspense. And Alypius, who kept close by me, waited in silence for the issue of this strange commotion. But what deep consideration had heaped together all my misery before the view of my heart, bringing with it a very great shower of tears, when, that I might more freely pour it forth with proper words, I arose and withdrew from Alypius, conceiving solitude to be more fit for the business of weeping, and I removed to that distance where even his presence might not be burdensome to me. Something of this, I knew not what, Alypius perceived from my words, in which the sound of my voice discovered that I was big with tears. I threw myself down under a certain fig-tree, and there gave free scope to my tears, floods of which broke from my eyes. And if not in these same words, yet to this purpose, I said unto Thee, 'And Thou, O Lord, how long, how long wilt Thou be angry to the end? Remember not my past iniquities.' For I perceived myself to be held by them, and sobbing, I added, 'How long, how long? to-morrow and to-morrow. Why not now? Why not this very hour end my shame?'”†

“And, behold, whilst speaking thus, and weeping

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. XI.

† Ibid., Ch. XII.

with bitter contrition, I heard a voice from a neighboring house, as of a boy or girl, saying in a singing voice: 'Take up and read, take up and read.' And presently, my countenance being altered, I began considering intently, whether in any kind of play children were wont to sing such words, but I could not call to mind ever having heard the like.

"Then the course of my tears being suppressed, feeling certain that it was nothing less than a divine admonition that I should open St. Paul's Epistles, I ran to the spot where Alypius was sitting, and where I had laid down the book. I caught it up, opened it, and read in silence the words on which I first cast my eyes: 'Not in revellings and drunkenness; not in chamberings and impurities; not in contention and envy; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.' I would not read further, nor was there need. For with the end of this sentence, a light as of confidence and security had streamed into my heart, dissipating all its former obscurities."*

"Then, putting my finger or some other mark in the place, I shut the book, and, with a countenance that was now tranquil and serene, related all to Alypius, who in the following manner discovered to me all that was passing in his mind which I did not know. He asked to see what I had read. I showed it to him. He looked on further than I had read, and discerned these words: 'Him that is weak in the faith take upon you,' which he applied to himself, and, strengthened by this admonition, without any hesitation, he joined himself to me in this good resolution, which was very agreeable

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. XII.

to his virtuous inclinations and manners, and we both hastened to my mother."*

Thus, after seventeen years of resistance did Augustine surrender, vanquished by Monica's tears. And it is worthy of remark that the termination of this struggle, the consummation of this conversion, which is the most touching in the history of the Church and of humanity, was not effected by a revelation of light more complete and vivid than any which had preceded it, but by a revelation of purity and innocence, so true is it that it is not so difficult to find the truth as to return to the practice of virtue.

St. Augustine's conversion has appeared so great a miracle to the Church, that she has deemed it, along with one other, that of St. Paul, worthy of commemoration, and has thoughtfully devoted to this purpose the day immediately following his mother's feast, the 5th of May. The last chants of the office of St. Monica, mingle with the first hymns which celebrate St. Augustine's conversion, and the one solemnity unites and honors the tears of the mother which purchased her son, and the tears of the son which consoled the mother.

Augustine's first thought, in fact, after his conversion, was to hasten to St. Monica, throw himself into her arms, and bathe her in his tears. Mother and son clasped each other in that close and silent embrace which seems to constitute human expression when emotion permits of no other.†

In his ecstasy of joy, and in the flood of light which inundated his soul, Augustine at last realized the value

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. XII.

† Confessions, Book IX., Ch. I.

of his mother's tears. And, mute with this consciousness, he pressed her to his heart, expressing to her by his silence, what he never throughout his after-life grew weary of repeating, "Yes, Lord, if I am Thy servant, it is because I am the son of Thy handmaid." And again, "To my mother, to her prayers and merits, I owe all that I am."* And elsewhere, "If I love truth above all else, and for its sake would lay down my life, for this I am indebted to my mother, whose prayers God could not withstand."† "My mother's constant tears obtained my conversion."‡ This sentiment of Augustine's heart he manifested continually throughout his writings, and is what he essayed to convey to Monica in that prolonged, mute embrace.

As for St. Monica, she could hardly contain her joy. She mingled her tears with Augustine's, and gazed upon him with rapture. Her prayers had been limited to the boon of seeing him a good Christian and an honest husband. And if God did but accord to her this favor, she felt that she would have died happy. But, as Augustine gradually regained composure, the most unexpected things were revealed to her. Augustine was not going to be satisfied with only remaining a Christian; he was going to vow himself to continence, solitude, contempt of all earthly things, and the love of God. Monica thrilled at each word. Who knows but God may have vouchsafed her a presentiment of the great things which were to happen, and that she may have seen, as the recompense of her twenty years of

* De Beat. Vit., in fine Præfat.

† De Ordine, Lib. II., Cap. XX.

‡ De Dono Perseverantiæ, Cap. XX., No. 53.

anguish, Augustine's head encircled with the doctoral cap and aureole of sanctity?*

O blissful moment, in which a mother finds again the child that she believed dead. O moment still more blissful, in which a Christian mother beholds reviving in her son's soul, faith, courage, and purity; and a Christian afflicted by the woes of the Church foresees that this self-same son shall one day become the Church's greatest light, her glory and her champion!

They still show the little chamber in Milan where St. Monica prayed, and the little garden where these touching scenes were enacted so long ago. And they will be shown for many a day to come. But even when time, which respects nothing, shall have destroyed the last vestige of the dwelling, the place will still be visited with tender interest. The beauty of this young man, in whom was mingled genius and tenderness of heart; his faults, and, in the midst of his faults, those glorious sadnesses of heart, which gain for him a share in the sympathy of all hearts, innocent or guilty; his long resistance to grace; his cries and struggles, like those of a wounded eagle which will not yield; and, contrasted with all this, the patience of God which accords him so tenderly the light he needs, and who, at length victorious, lifts him, without constraining his liberty, from the abysses of doubt and passion to the highest summits of truth, purity, and divine love; and, to complete the picture, this incomparable mother's sorrow which forces God to save her son—these are the things which humanity will never forget, and which, until the end of ages, will lead it to be impressed and purified at the spots which witnessed them.

* Confessions, Book VIII., Ch. XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CASSIACUM — ST. MONICA TAKES AUGUSTINE INTO THE COUNTRY TO PREPARE HIM FOR BAPTISM—SHE TAKES PART IN PHILOSOPHICAL CONFERENCES—THE MOTHER OF THE CHRISTIAN PLATO.

September, 386—January, 387.

“O MY God, I am Thy servant, and the son of Thy handmaid. Thou hast broken my bonds asunder. To Thee will I offer the sacrifice of praise. Let my heart and tongue praise Thee, and let all my bones say, Lord, who is like unto Thee? Let them say this, and do Thou reply to my soul, ‘I am thy salvation.’ O Christ! O Jesus! Thou art my helper and my Redeemer!”*

Along with these sentiments of admiration and gratitude which filled the heart of Augustine on this the morrow of his conversion, mingled another no less deep and sweet. Augustine felt himself a completely changed man; that which had yesterday charmed him, inspired only aversion in him to-day. “What joy was mine in detaching myself from those vain amusements! Thou didst expel them, who art the true and sovereign sweetness; Thou didst banish them, and didst come Thyself in their stead, Thou transcendent sweetness, light, and

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. I.

majesty. Nor was my mind free from the cares that beset those who pursue honors, earthly riches, and sensual delights; and my infant tongue began to address itself to Thee, my light, my riches, and my salvation."

St. Monica listened with ecstasy to these first effusions of Augustine's soul. No less ardent than he, for she was as happy, she joined with heart and voice in the hymns with which he celebrated his new birth; and having almost attained her zenith in the spiritual life, and consequently a wide experience in divine things, was competent to guide Augustine, who was yet but a novice.

In order to yield himself up without restraint to the thoughts of piety, repentance, and gratitude which animated his soul, Augustine desired to be alone with his mother in some solitude, untroubled by creatures. Unhappily he was overwhelmed with work, having to lecture several times a week, besides speaking in public, and giving to his numerous pupils those lessons in rhetoric which required such long and careful preparation. It was a martyrdom. His first idea was to send in his resignation, and then announce publicly that he had done so. But it was nearing the close of the month of August. The vacations began on the 16th of September, and as it was only a question of twenty days, he concluded that it would be better to be patient and retire quietly without drawing the attention of men to a fact which should obtain its just view only from God. Not, indeed, that he feared the judgment of men, "for Thou hadst pierced my heart with the arrows of Thy love; and Thy words, O my God, were fixed in my inward parts; and the examples of Thy servants, whom Thou hadst brought from darkness to

light, and from death to life, enkindled within me such ardor that any wind of opposition that could blow from a deceitful tongue, instead of extinguishing, would but have increased it." But while he feared the criticism of some, did not Augustine dread the praises of the others? for in taking such a step publicly he would attract general attention, and perhaps great eulogiums.

These reasons appeared to him decisive; and partly through prudence, partly through modesty, Augustine resolved, cost what it might, to await the vacation.*

But even with these precautions, the plan of retirement was not an easy one to realize. Augustine had now been teaching two years at Milan with extraordinary success. His genius, his sympathetic and attractive manner, and his style, which was characterized by qualities of the very highest order, as well as by the defects of the period in which he lived, had gathered about his chair a multitude of ardent young auditors, such as always surround him who puts his very soul into his words. Unhappily, however, this arduous labor had proved too much for Augustine. His chest became affected, and his voice lost its compass. It became clearly evident that this young man's delicate bodily organization was inadequate to his zeal, and that he would be forced to abandon his profession.

When this sad fact first dawned upon Augustine, he wept. But now that he yearned only for solitude and contemplation, he hailed gladly this excuse for retiring, which would enable him to conceal the principal one. But still another difficulty presented itself. Augustine was poor, and his public lessons had been his own

* Confessions, Book II., Ch. II.

and his mother's principal support. Happily, Romanianus, ever generous, was in Milan, and had already offered more than once to insure to Augustine, whenever the latter desired it, the leisure and solitude so necessary to genius. "You, O noble friend," thus Augustine wrote to him some months later, "who had already watched over the cradle and nest of my early studies, and later on aided my first daring flight, again came to my aid. Yes, if in the repose I now enjoy, I rejoice to be free from so many hindering cares, if I breathe and enjoy my liberty and leisure to devote myself wholly to the contemplation of truth, to you do I owe this happiness; for no sooner had I disclosed to you the trouble and agitation of my mind, and that no life would be congenial to me save that which would leave me leisure for the pursuit of wisdom, which leisure I could not hope to enjoy, inasmuch as I had to support my mother and my son, so deeply did you feel for me that you not only promised me liberty, but promised also to share it with me."*

Relieved from this anxiety, and seeing only a short delay between him and desired solitude, Augustine completed his course of lectures. But those twenty days seemed to him an eternity. His work had lost all attraction for him; all his longings pointed elsewhere. His only consolation was, when he returned home in the evening, wearied and exhausted, to close the door, and alone with his mother, to converse with her about the marvels which God had worked in him.

As soon as the vacations began, St. Monica carried Augustine off into the country; for she was no less

* Contra Acad., Lib. II., Ch. II.

impatient than he to attain the solitude so favorable to the process going on in his soul, by which God was completing the work commenced twenty years before. A friend and colleague of Augustine's, named Verecundus, whom the former had taken into his confidence, had placed his villa at their disposal, and here it was that St. Monica, about the 16th or 17th of September, 386, installed herself with her son.

The precise site of this house has never been ascertained, but we have an exact description of the house itself, and are perfectly acquainted with the landscape surrounding it.

It was one of those large and pleasant country houses for which the Romans displayed so great a fondness, especially in the last days of the empire; possessed of spacious halls, covered porticoes, baths, a library; and without, terraces, shady groves, plenty of space, air, light, and every convenience,—in a word, everything requisite to a spot devoted to repose and enjoyment. From the house stretched a lawn which rested the gaze, and afforded, beneath its border of lofty trees, an agreeable strolling-place and grateful shady spots for conversation or reading. One end of this lawn formed the rocky bed of a torrent which was dried up during a part of the year, but which the autumn rains and winter snows caused to fill the valley with the monotonous sound of its waters. The view from the windows or terraces of the villa commanded a tranquil landscape, vast enough to give full liberty to the sight of the gazer, but terminating in the distance in lofty mountains, as if to lead it, with the thoughts, heavenward. These mountains formed a spur of the Alps and Apennines. They described an immense circle, within which were to be

seen meadows, vineyards, orchards, hills covered with great trees, blue lakes sparkling in the bosom of the earth, all the verdure of a Swiss country, as it were, beneath the warmly-toned Italian sky. The house had been placed on an eminence, in order that the spectator might enjoy to the full the grandeur and the calm of the magnificent view.*

Summer had departed. The cooler rays of the autumn sun shone upon the land. The leaves had not yet begun to fall, but already the gaudy tints of crimson and gold, which give to September such brilliance in the country, were appearing here and there among them. It was the time when nature seems to clothe herself in a graver and sadder garb, as if preparing to die. There are certain mental conditions in which the soul finds, amid such scenes, an infinite charm. It was at such a time, and into such a spot as this, that Monica brought Augustine to hide their new-found joy, and prepare together for his baptism.

A few young men had joined them, whom ties of kindred, sympathy, similarity of origin, tastes, or doubts had attracted about Augustine, and of these nearly all beheld like him the glorious dawn of faith amid the shadows of their errors.

Let us name the principal ones among these. The first was Adeodatus, or Gift of God. He was just emerging from boyhood, and it was predicted of him that he would equal his father, who had transmitted to him his genius. "We brought with us," writes St. Augustine, "the boy Adeodatus, carnally born of my

* This description has been carefully taken from the different works composed by Augustine at Cassiacum.

sin; but Thou hast endowed him well. Though barely fifteen years of age, he surpassed in knowledge many grave and learned men; each day revealed fresh tokens of his wisdom, so that I was astonished at his genius.* Happily Adeodatus joined to it an innocence and piety that were extraordinary. He it was who, when asked one day in whom did God dwell, replied: "In him who lives chastely." And on Augustine insisting upon knowing whether by this he meant one who avoided all great faults opposed to this virtue, he answered: "Oh, no; there is no soul truly chaste but she who has her gaze ever fixed on God, and who clings to none save Him." Adeodatus had not yet received baptism, but was preparing for it with such fervor that St. Monica was obliged to restrain it. In sight of this precocious genius and virginal candor, the beholder involuntarily wondered what glorious work in His Church would be assigned him by God when he should have attained the fuller development of his character and intellect. But this he was never to reach upon the earth. An angelic childhood, a pure youth, baptism received with the dispositions of a saint, and, soon after, death, made up the short and glorious life of this child. "I think of him with joy," writes St. Augustine after his death; "not a cloud obscures his memory." †

The second was Navigius, Augustine's brother, and Monica's second son. He had received the sacrament of baptism some time before; and timid, almost constantly ill and suffering, and though gifted with much of the contemplative piety of Monica, possessing none of the genius of Augustine, his life was one of silence and prayer.

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. VI.

† Ibid., Ch. VII.

The third was Alypius, with whom our readers are already acquainted. He was not allied to Augustine by blood, but was his most intimate friend, "his heart's brother," to quote the beautiful expression of the Saint. After having experienced the errors and doubts, without the passions of Augustine, light had dawned upon him at the same hour, and in the same place in which it had come to his friend. Together they were preparing for baptism, and the Church was to one day behold them, both bishops, consecrate equally devoted hearts, if unequal geniuses, to her service.

Augustine had brought two other youths with him, not precisely friends, for they were too young, but rather pupils, whom he loved as a father, and whose education he conducted with the most tender care. These were Licentius and Trigetius.

Trigetius was twenty years of age, of a lofty mind and studious tastes; attracted by all that appeared to him great, noble, or beautiful. He had at first desired to be a soldier, but revolted by the vulgarity and brutality which characterized that profession, had returned to his studies, and devoted himself especially to that of history, which he loved as if he had been an old man.* His vivacity charmed Augustine, who joyfully watched him preparing to receive baptism.

Licentius gave him more anxiety. His was one of those passionate natures which nothing can restrain or satisfy. He fairly adored poetry. He grew pale with emotion at the recital of a great action. He composed verses even at table. He sang the choruses of Sophocles with wonderful expression, and wept in reading

* *Contra Acad.*, Lib. I., p. 424. *De Ordine*, Lib. I., p. 533.

Virgil, but cared little for philosophical questions, and still less for religious ones.

This troubled Augustine, and the more so because this brilliant young man was the son of Romanianus, who had confided him, when very young, to the former. "So," says St. Paulinus, "Augustine loved him tenderly, and endeavored to be to him father, mother, and nurse." From the exceptional care which he bestowed on him, it is evident that Augustine strove in this way to pay his debt of gratitude to the boy's father, and that there were no sacrifices he was not ready to impose on himself in order to make Licentius a distinguished man and a Christian. The first was easy; the second, more doubtful.

Two cousins of Augustine, Lastidianus and Rusticus, of whom we know nothing, completed the number of young men who accompanied Monica and Augustine to Cassiacum. Two other friends of Augustine were lacking at this reunion—and, alas! would ever be lacking—Nebridius and Verecundus.

Nebridius, of whom we have already spoken, had quitted all, father, mother, and country, to follow Augustine and profit by his instructions. An ardent seeker after truth, but full of errors in regard to Jesus Christ, gentle, modest, fleeing the world, seeking solitude in order to have more time to devote to the great questions which occupied his mind, he was advancing toward the light by the same path that Augustine had followed. His absence was felt at Cassiacum. It made a void which every one experienced, but Augustine more than any one else. But, though absent in body, he was present in mind. He wrote constantly. Each day he put new questions to Augustine respecting the

highest truths, for the solution of which he was so impatient that Augustine was forced to beg time for consideration. He prepared with the rest for baptism, and from the baptismal font, whence he emerged inflamed with apostolic ardor, "he passed," says Augustine, "to Abraham's bosom. Whatever it is that is meant by that bosom, there lives Nebridius, my gentle friend. For where else could such a soul be? He is in the abode of the blessed, concerning which abode he asked so many questions of me, a poor inexperienced mortal. No more he lays his ear to my mouth, but approaches his lips to Thee, O fountain of life, and there drinks to his fill with a thirst ever new, happy forever. And yet I can not think that he is so inebriated therewith as to forget me, since Thou, the fountain at which he drinketh, art pleased to be mindful of us."*

As for Verecundus, he it was who had lent his villa to St. Monica. Gentle, honorable, noble-minded, and possessing a pious wife, he hesitated, inexplicably enough, to become a Christian. He died shortly after having been baptized, and adoring, with his latest breath, the God whom he was deemed worthy to know. "Thus wast Thou pleased to have compassion, not on him only, but on us," writes St. Augustine, "whose grief would have been insupportable had we been unable to think of such a friend as among the number of Thine elect. Yes, my God, Thou wilt reward Verecundus for his hospitality at Cassiacum, where, retired from the world, we repose in Thee with the eternal freshness and pleasantness of Thy paradise." †

Behold Cassiacum! The locality, its peace, the de

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. III.

† Ibid.

lightful season, and the reunion of friends, were all in such harmony with the dispositions, attractions, and aspirations of Augustine, that only a mother could have prepared such a cradle for her son's new birth. St. Monica had chosen this solitude with a mother's instinct, and illumined it with the faith, nobleness of mind, sweetness of disposition, and the heroic ardor of her saintly heart. Moreover, the love she felt for her son, she extended to all his friends, those restless, agitated, beautiful and youthful souls, in whom, with the insight of a saint, she discerned the Christians, the future priests, and perhaps bishops, doctors, and apostles. "Therefore," says St. Augustine, admirably, "she took as much care of us all as if she had been the mother of us all, and served us as if she had been the daughter of us all." *

But her respect for them did not prevent her from giving each one the direction which he expected from her, and which her age, sanctity, character of mother and even grandmother, entitled her to give. She warned with sweetness. She remonstrated with impressiveness. By a single word or look she raised these souls to God. In a word, she employed her entire mind, genius, faith, all the ardor of her zeal, all the ingenuity of her charity, to further the action of Divine love within their hearts. She was the apostle of this little band.

Her first care, before leaving Milan, had been to acquaint St. Ambrose with the marvellous change which had taken place in Augustine, and ask his advice concerning the manner in which the latter should pre-

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. IX.

pare himself for baptism. Besides solitude and prayer, Ambrose had recommended the Holy Scriptures, and in particular, the book of the Prophet Isaiah. No doubt he thought that his incomparable grandeur of expression would commend him to the imagination and heart of Augustine; and besides, of all the prophets, Isaiah is the one who has spoken most clearly of the conversion of the peoples to Jesus Christ, and who has used throughout his inspired pages the most beautiful language on the preparation of the heart for the coming of Jesus Christ. Only, whilst Isaiah addressed to the people those beautiful words, such as, "Be ye converted, O ye people, make straight your paths," he heard others which carried away his soul, as they will ever carry others, into the depths of the eternal mysteries. Augustine commenced to read Isaiah, but was stopped at the very first pages by difficulties which he desired to penetrate, and became conscious that if he continued, reading would degenerate into study, and therefore closed the book, and opened instead the book of the Psalms, probably at the suggestion of his mother. Here he learned what he most needed to learn—to pray and weep.

David's is peculiarly the voice of prayer, and above all, of penitent prayer. It would appear as if God had expressly created him in order that every sorrow, temptation, danger, and glory to which humanity is susceptible, might find its prototype in him, and that he might supply the human race with songs of joy and chants of sorrow for every situation in life. He is born in a hut, and dies on a throne; tends his flocks in Bethlehem's valleys, and then commands armies; every glory and every happiness is experienced by him; victory perches on

his banners, and poetry, religion, and friendship combine to raise him far above the ordinary plane of humanity; then he is betrayed, persecuted, conquered, driven into exile, obliged to flee before his son, who perishes ignominiously before his eyes, while he is powerless to save him; is alternately the sport of good and evil fortune, which carry him successively to the extremes of human conditions. But even this is the least remarkable part of his life. Blessed by God in his cradle, he passes from a holy childhood and youth to a holier middle age; vouchsafed a clearer light than was accorded the prophets; saluting the Messiah in transports of the most ardent love; he suddenly falls from these summits of grace into the sins of adultery, perfidy, and homicide. But even in the depths of this abyss, he does not despair either of the beauty of his soul or of the goodness of God, but raises tearful eyes to the Divine purity, and makes of penance a ladder by which to mount higher than before. But his tears never cease, and sorrow, gratitude, and Divine love unite in awakening strains from his harp which the Gospel itself has not surpassed, and which will arouse echoes in the human heart as long as time shall be. How, then, could Augustine fail to find therein the unction of which his soul had need? There is a resemblance between circumstances as between persons. Therefore he hardly opened the Psalms before the feelings that filled his heart found vent.

“What cries did I send up to Thee, my God, when I, a novice in Thy pure love, read those psalms of David, those canticles animated by such humble and fervent faith! What affectionate words did I utter to Thee, and how much was I inflamed by them with love

of Thee, and burned with a desire of reciting them, if I could, all the world over, to abate the swelling pride of mankind. By turns I shuddered with fear, was inflamed by hope, and thrilled with joy at Thy compassion, O my Father! And all these things issued forth by my eyes, and by my voice, when Thy loving Spirit, turning to us, says: '*Ye sons of men, how long will ye be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?*' For had I not loved vanity and sought a lie? Therefore I listened, and was filled with emotion at the remembrance that I was one of these.

"And then I read: *Be angry and sin not.* And how was I moved thereby, O my God, I whom Thou hadst taught to be angry with myself on account of my past sins, that for the time to come I might sin no more. For there it was, in the secret of my soul, where I felt compunction, and where I had sacrificed to Thee, slaying my old life; and there it was Thou, my God, hadst begun to grow sweet unto me, and hadst given gladness to my heart, inundating me with joy, and each word I read pierced my soul and made me cry out.

"And the following verse, oh! how I watered it with my tears: *In peace, in the self-same I will take my rest.* O happy words! *In Him alone will I rest and take my sleep.* Yes, my God, Thou art that self-same, indeed, who changest not. In Thee art rest and oblivion of all labors. This it is whereon Thou hast established my hope.

"I read this and was all on fire, and would fain have opened the ears of those that were dead, one of whom I had been, as pestilent as any of them, when bitter and blind I barked against Thy holy word, all radiant with heaven's own light, and sweet as honey. I pined

away with grief by reason of the enemy of those divine books. O my God, how shall I express all I felt at that happy time?" *

Whilst Augustine was thus eagerly reading, and experiencing transports of joy caused by the joy of his new faith, joy and admiration chained Monica to his side. She never quitted him. She pointed out to him the psalms which suited him best; she read them with him. "Alypius," says St. Augustine, "read with me, as also did my mother, who could not tear herself from me." She even explained them, for she had advanced further than he in the way of divine love, and, having a second time given him birth, gladly conducted him through this world of light, in which, as yet, he was hardly able to walk alone. "For I was as yet but a novice in Thy love," he goes on to say, "and my friend Alypius was also a novice and simple catechumen like myself; but it was far otherwise with my mother, who, though a woman, had a man's strong faith, the serene light of age, a mother's tenderness, and a Christian's piety." †

Occupied, however, as was Augustine in preparing his soul for baptism, he did not forget his cherished philosophical studies. After having employed his morning in reading and meditating on the psalms, toward the middle of the day he rejoined his young friends. If the sky was clear and the weather fine, they seated themselves under a tree on the greensward.‡ But if

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. IV.

† Ibid.

‡ "We went out," says St. Augustine; "the day was so calm and fair that it seemed as if it were made to enlighten and purify our souls."

the weather were rainy or cold, they sought a bath-room, whose warm atmosphere was soothing to Augustine's weak chest. In either place, long hours were passed in serious but amicable discussion on questions of philosophy and literature. Sometimes they read the half of a book of Virgil, who had always been a favorite with Augustine; sometimes an essay of Cicero, and in particular the "Hortensius," to which he had vowed a grateful admiration. But most frequently they discussed great questions of philosophy—such as happiness, and in what does it consist? [de Beata Vita]; the divine seal of order which God has impressed upon the universe [de Ordine]; the need of truth which the soul experiences, and the impotence of philosophy to satisfy wholly this need [Contra Manichæus]; God and the soul,—questions which the Saint was then studying, and endeavoring to shed upon them all the light of his genius.

Augustine has been called the Christian Plato. This he is at Cassiacum. Later he will become the bishop, controversialist, and doctor, wield his pen against the Donatists and Pelagians, and wing his eagle flights to the height of Christianity's dogmas; but at the time of which we speak, he was yet too young, and being a layman, dare not touch the ark. Therefore he contents himself with a discussion of these sublime questions to which Plato had offered imperfect answers, but which Augustine succeeds in solving completely. Plato and Augustine are brothers, but of unequal age. The first, in the dawn of life, in its sweet and poetic spring, offers more flowers than fruit. He dreams rather than possesses. He has a sublime ideal in view; he thrills with love of it, but does not attain it. He

seeks a way to it ; perceives one and describes it, but knows not how to enter upon it, and dies without bearing in his soul the fruits of which his youth had held the blossoms. The other, after cruel struggles, and many years of courageous effort, enters resolutely on the path which the first had pointed out. Plato declares : “ In order to arrive at the beatific vision, the heart must be purified, healed, and loosened from the fetters with which the love of riches and of pleasure binds us to the earth. Augustine did purify himself ; did loosen the fetters which bound him.” Plato declares again : “ To reason is to learn how to die. What will enable us to see God ? Purity and death.”

And Augustine studied this great art ; he put it into practice at Cassiacum, and like a river whose dikes are broken, light flooded his mighty intellect. What with Plato had been but hope and conjecture, was certainty to Augustine. What existed as a confused but sublime presentiment in the rich imagination of the philosopher, subsists clear and distinct in the luminous reason of the saint, and finds expression in accents undreamed of by Plato. Whoever would know Augustine in his first flights, should study the discussions and conferences at Cassiacum. They are the first flower of his youth which will never bloom again ; the sweet and tender light of a dawning day characterized by a freshness of idea and sentiment, a tranquil enthusiasm, and a gentle gayety. His genius, hitherto imprisoned, had found its strength, and mounted in a transport of happiness toward the true, the beautiful, and the good. But no more in the elevation of his genius than in the effusions of his penitent heart, did St. Monica abandon her son. Only when there was question of faith and

piety, it was she who would not leave him; when there was question of study and philosophical discussion, it was he who exacted her presence at all the conferences which he held with his young friends. And when she would have modestly excused herself from so doing, urging in excuse, with a sweet smile, that she had never seen a woman seated in the midst of men, Augustine replied: "Even if true, what does that signify? Is not philosophy the love of truth? And do not you, my mother, love truth? Why then should you not take your place among us? Did you but love truth with an ordinary affection, it would still be my duty to welcome you and listen to you. How much more, seeing that your love for truth exceeds that you bear me; and what that love is, I know full well! Nothing can wean you from the love of truth; neither fear, sorrow, nor even death itself! Is not this the very essence of philosophy? Wherefore, then, should I hesitate to avow myself your disciple?" *

Monica, overwhelmed by such a eulogium uttered in presence of all, could hardly find words strong enough to assure Augustine, with a modest sweetness, that never before had he been guilty of such a breach of the truth.†

But it was not only because she loved the truth above all else, and was resolved to die for it if necessary, that Augustine was anxious to have his mother present at the conferences; it was also on account of the keenness of her intellect, which, according to Augustine, verged on genius. There was no question, however deep or intricate, which Monica did not enter into

* De Ordine, Lib. I., Ch. XI., n. 32.

† Ibid., n. 33.

with promptitude and a singular facility. For instance, one day Augustine was discoursing of numbers in the presence of his young friends, and in particular their place in geometry and music; suddenly he stopped at the most difficult part of the subject, and looking at his mother, addressed her in these beautiful words: "Though others may fear to encounter these difficult questions, which produce upon them the effect of an impenetrable forest; they do not alarm you, my dear mother, whose genius impresses me anew each day, and whose soul, either because of your age or of your wonderful virtue, ascends so far above the region of frivolity and sense. All these questions appear as easy to you as they would appear difficult to gross and terrestrial minds. If I were to assert," added the holy doctor, affably, "that you succeeded in expressing your thoughts and sentiments in a perfect manner, I would not be saying what is true, since I myself, who have made a study of Latin, am every day surprised in mistakes by the natives of this country. It is not at all impossible that a savant on the watch for solecisms might find some in my discourses. Have I not frequently met with intelligent persons who insisted that Cicero was guilty of them? As for incorrect idioms, they are so frequently used that even the discourse on the preservation of Rome is full of them.

"You, my mother, doubtless care little for these purities of style; but so well do you know the genius and almost divine power of language, that the truly learned will readily perceive that if you disregard the form, you retain the true spirit."

Therefore, for these two reasons—because St. Monica loved the truth so much that she would sacrifice her life

for it, and because she had been endowed with a noble and exalted mind—did Augustine absolutely insist on her attendance at the philosophical conferences ; also for another reason, of a more general character. At all conversations and discussions between men, the presence of a refined woman is useful. She imposes a certain degree of reserve, and imparts an atmosphere of delicacy and grace. Where men—especially learned men—are tempted to use only their minds, she rouses the heart, thus preventing science from taking upon itself that character of dryness which Bossuet deplures. And when those conversations and discourses on God, the Soul, and the Infinite, end, as they always should, with prayers and hymns, it is she who gives wings to the hymns and imparts fervor to the prayers. They had a beautiful example of this at Cassiacum. Augustine had treated of Providence. He demonstrated it as admirable in its distribution of good and its permission of evil. After long circuits, having arrived at that moment when divine light inundates the soul, when emotion overpowers the heart, and when all those beautiful contemplations are merged in adoration and love, he suddenly stops, and turning to his mother, addresses to her these words, which display the whole of Augustine's character, and which would of themselves suffice to insure eternal honor to St. Monica :

“ In order that these prayers and aspirations may be uttered with more devotion and fervor, we intrust them to you, to whose tears I owe my present dispositions and my love of truth. How, then, can I doubt, that after having won for me, by your tears and prayers, the grace to ardently desire truth, you will obtain for me by your holy prayers the grace to possess it in its fullness.”

St. Monica did not merely attend the conferences she frequently spoke, and as God grants to purity and love a singular gift of light, Augustine immediately transcribed her words on tablets, and we, in our turn, will peruse them in order to know better the mother of the Christian Plato.

The most celebrated of all the conferences at Cassiacum, that on which the magnificent mind of St. Monica shed most light, took place on the 13th of November, 386, the thirty-second birth-day of Augustine. The Saint had assembled at her table all the friends of her son, and served them with one of those Christian repasts, characterized by a sobriety and gentle gayety in no way incompatible with freedom and grandeur of thought. During the repast, the conversation naturally turned on life—it being the anniversary of the day on which Augustine had first known its smiles and tears—and on happy life, since life instinctively craves happiness. Dinner ended, the party retired to the baths, the day being cold and rainy, and the conversation continued on the same subject, directed by St. Augustine, who himself proposed the questions, and urged his young friends to reply,—like the eagle which, taking her young on her wings, soars sunwards.

What is life? In what does it consist? Where is the source which renews and sustains it? They soon passed from the discussion, as unworthy of fixing the attention, of this miserable and dying life of the body, which is confined to earth and dependent on earthly aliments, to that of the only life which deserves the name, the spiritual life, or life of the soul. Augustine asked, what was the food of the soul? “It has but one,” answered St. Monica, “knowing and loving the

truth." Trigetius disputed this; he maintained that there are two foods on which the soul may subsist; asserting in proof of this, that while there are souls whom truth nourishes, there are others which subsist on vanity, errors, and deception. But here St. Augustine took up the argument and proved Trigetius wrong, in that errors, vanities, and illusions do not nourish the soul, but render it empty, sterile, and weak; and his mother right, in that the only nourishment worthy of the soul, and capable of satisfying it, is truth. But whither tends life? Life is an activity, a movement; to what end? On this sad earth, in this vale of tears, where we drink of the bitter waters called life, what do we desire or ask save happiness?* All applauded this.

This, in fact, is the great end of life. Hardly is man born into the world than the desire of happiness makes itself felt in his consciousness; and throughout his existence, every sensation, thought, and wish, craves it.

But what is this happiness? How is it to be attained? What conditions are necessary to its existence? It is thus St. Augustine puts this leading question: "Tell me, who is the happy man? Is it not he who has all that he desires?" "Oh, no!" replied St. Monica, earnestly, "if he desires and possesses the good, then, indeed, is he happy; but should he desire what is evil, even though he obtain it, most unhappy is he." Augustine was deeply impressed with this answer, and said smilingly, "O, my mother, there you have touched one of the summits of philosophy";† and in proof of this he proceeded to recite the follow-

* De Beata Vita, n. 10.

† Ibid.

ing admirable passage from the "Hortensius": "The majority, not of philosophers but of disputants, declare those happy who have all that they desire. This is a mistake; for to wish for what is evil is the very height of misery. Far better not to have what we desire than to have what is injurious. Therefore the injury done to the soul by desiring that which is evil, is far greater than the happiness which the greatest good fortune could bestow." *

Monica listened attentively to these noble words; and when Augustine had ceased, she took them up in her turn, enlarged upon them, explained them, and revealed their excellence so admirably, that all present forgot her sex, and "thought," according to St. Augustine, "that they were listening to some eminent doctor. As for me, ravished with delight, I contemplated the Divine source whence flowed such beauteous thoughts." †

The discussion proceeded. Augustine desired to solve the problem of happiness. They had rejected evil as a means of rendering man happy; they next considered the potency of any condition which is without guilt, simply perishable and transitory, such as riches, health, glory, and beauty afford. Can man find happiness in any or all of these?

St. Augustine declared, "No; for how can we possess that which is but transitory, unstable, and fleeting? Or even if we possessed it, how prevent its eluding our grasp?" All applauded.

"And yet," urged Trigetius, "there are some who possess these fleeting things in such abundance that they have not a single wish ungratified." ‡

* De Beata Vita, n. 10.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid., n. 11.

Augustine replied, "Tell, me, Trigetius, can he who fears be happy?"

"No," said Trigetius.

"Can he who loves be free from fear when he knows that he may lose the object of his love?"

"He can not," answered Trigetius.

"And is not all that is fleeting, transitory, mortal, liable to be lost?"

"It is."

"Then," concluded Augustine, "he who loves and possesses perishable things can not be happy."*

"Certainly not," added Monica; "but I will go further. Were he even sure of never losing them, I would still esteem him unfortunate, because that which is fleeting is unable to ever satisfy the needs of the human soul. And the more man seeks his happiness therein, the more miserable and indigent will he be."

"What," said St. Augustine, "if he possessed all terrestrial things in abundance, knew how to limit his desires, and was versed in the art of enjoying with dignity and moderation, would he not be happy?"

"No," answered St. Monica; "all the things of this earth will never render the soul happy."†

"Oh, how beautiful," answered Augustine. "What better answer could possibly be given to such a question! Yes, whoever desires to be happy, let him rise above all transitory things; let him seek that which is changeless, and which no reverse of fortune can ever take from him. Only God has this attribute of immutability; therefore in Him alone is happiness to be found."

This was greeted with pious and hearty applause

* De Beata Vita, n. 11.

† Ibid.

But if nothing created, nothing human, however beautiful, can satisfy the hunger of the human soul, and if God only is able to do so, how can man possess Him? For having granted, firstly, that the human soul craves happiness; and, secondly, that this happiness is only to be found in God, it follows that we must be able to attain to God, and within a certain limit obtain the gratification of our desire and the dissipation of all our fears. St. Augustine put this into the following form: "He is happy who possesses God. But tell me, in whom does God dwell?"

Licentius was the first to answer. "For my part," he said, "I think God dwells in him who acts aright."*

"God dwells in him who does His will," answered Trigētius.

Then came Adeodatus' turn to answer, who did so in the beautiful words, which we have already cited, "God dwells in him whose heart is pure."

St. Monica applauded.†

"And who is the man whose heart is pure?" said St. Augustine, pressing Adeodatus to make him explain his thought more fully.

"It is he," replied the boy, "who lives chastely."

"And what is it to live chastely? To avoid grave faults only?" ‡

"Oh, no," replied Adeodatus. "There is no soul truly pure, save that which loves God and clings to Him only."§

Thus, in these short sentences, did this child,—who, to be sure, was St. Augustine's son, and St. Monica's

* De Beata Vita, n. 12.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid., n. 18.

§ Ibid.

grandson,—utter the final word of all philosophy, as of all religion. No earthly thing can satisfy the soul. Its happiness consists in the possession of God. And there is only one means of possessing Him, either in time or in eternity, and that is, loving Him. For love laughs at distance and ignores space; it unites souls between whom the whole earth stretches, and in uniting beautifies and transfigures them. And if it be true that even when the object of its love is an earthly, limited being, love renders the soul indifferent to fatigue, sorrow, and privation, and communicates to it a peace, security, and invincible strength, and inspires her not only with joy, but with rapture, what must love do when its object is God? And this is why the saints have been happy, even on the cross; and if the world sees their joy without comprehending it, it is because the world knows not what it is to love.

On the following day this conversation was resumed, and presently, those who seek God became the subject of discussion. It had been asserted that they only are happy who possess God. But what could be urged on behalf of those who do not possess Him, yet seek Him? It was Augustine who put this question, as his great soul glanced sadly out upon those who were still tossing upon that sea of doubt, whose ebb and flow he knew so well. They first discussed the Academicians,—that is to say, those philosophers who, having sought truth and failed to find it, despair of ever doing so, and accept doubt as final.

“Happy they,” said St. Monica, smiling, “*caducari sunt!*” This play upon words,—for the Latin phrase is susceptible of two meanings, signifying both, *they are attached to perishable things*, and *they are epi-*

leptic, that is, miserable, view them as you will,—elicited smiles and applause from the assemblage.

From these they passed on to those who seek God. "Let us suppose a man who does not despair of truth, who has sufficient confidence in God to believe that He has not left man without light, and who seeks that light; is such a man happy or not?"

"He is unhappy," said the young man, "for he does not possess God."

"Are you so sure of that?" said St. Augustine, who, throughout these discussions, ever pleaded the cause of those whose doubts he had shared. "You, Licentius, maintain that he possesses God who does the will of God; does not he who seeks God, do His will? You, Trigetius, declare that he possesses God who acts aright; does not he who seeks God, act aright? And you, Adeodatus, I ask only one thing: can he who has an impure heart seek God?"

But Augustine had taken these three young men beyond their depth. They regarded Augustine in silence, half smiling and half confused. Seeing that they made no attempt to reply, Monica came to the rescue, and with her keen intellect speedily unravelled the thread of Augustine's rather subtle argument. She showed that, to be happy, it is not enough for God to dwell in us, for He dwells in all alike, as well in those who seek Him as in those who possess Him. He must be our friend, and He is only the friend of those who possess Him.

Licentius now spoke. "If they who seek God have Him not for their friend," he said, "they must have Him for an enemy, and this I will never admit."

"Nor I," said Trigetius; "but there must be a medium between the two."

“Yes,” replied Monica, quoting a text from the Holy Scriptures: “‘He who lives holily has God within him as a friend; he who lives an evil life has God within him as his enemy; he who is seeking God, and has not yet found Him, has Him neither for his friend nor for his enemy; but God is not far from such a man.’ Do you admit this?”

“Yes,” they answered.

“Stay a moment,” interrupted Augustine, who was not content with the lot assigned to the seekers after God; “is not God the friend of those to whom He is favorable?”

“Yes,” they answered.

“Then is it certain that he who seeks and finds God has God for his friend, and is happy. He who seeks, but has not yet found God, has God for his friend, but is not yet happy. He who wanders from and refuses to acknowledge God, who is drawn away by his various passions, is neither happy, nor has he God for his friend.”*

An admirable doctrine, though somewhat subtly expressed, worthy of the great doctor who had himself passed through all these mental conditions, and knew by experience how near is God to those who seek Him, and how sweet to those who have found Him.

The discussion was not finished until the third day. The rainy weather, which had compelled the little group to meet on the two preceding days in the room adjoining the baths, had given place to a beautiful day. They went out into the garden, and seated themselves under a tree.

* De Beata Vita, n. 21.

Having discussed, on the first day, those who possess God; the second day, those who are seeking Him; they began to treat, this third day, of those who possess Him not, of their misery, indigence, and sterility. Monica assisted at this conference, and spoke twice. Trigetius had just asked the rather subtle question, if all those who are miserable are indigent. He cited a rich man, of whom Cicero speaks, who possessed every earthly good: an illustrious name, a vast fortune, a spotless reputation, respect and honor, yet enjoyed none of them because he dreaded the loss of all. "He was miserable," said Trigetius, "but not indigent."

At this point of the argument Monica spoke. "I do not well understand," she said, "these distinctions, and I fail to see what can prevent misery from being indigence, or indigence from being misery. Shall we call a person indigent who has neither gold nor silver, and not indigent when he has not wisdom?"*

All applauded this classing of spiritual gifts among the elements of fortune. St. Augustine was delighted that it should have been his mother who offered this solution, which he considered had never been surpassed by any of the philosophical writers. "You see," he remarked to his young friends, "the difference between studying a number of books and keeping oneself in intimate union with God, in which the soul finds the beautiful thoughts which we admire in my mother."†

Augustine terminated these discussions by some words full of faith and calm enthusiasm: "Let us think of God, seek Him, and thirst for Him, who is the light of the soul. Even when our eyes, too weak

* De Beata Vita, n. 27.

† Ibid.

or too lately opened, can not discern His full splendor every truth we utter proceeds from Him. True, until we have found Him and drunk at the fountain of light, we have not yet reached our final goal. We are neither wise nor happy, neither shall we be so until we fully know and love the Triune God—the Father the source of truth, the Son who is the truth, and the Holy Ghost by whom we are united to the truth.”*

At these words, Monica, recognizing the words graven on her memory, for they were those of her spiritual father, the great and illustrious St. Ambrose, and she had often heard them chanted in the Church of Milan, cried out with transport: “Holy Trinity! receive our prayers!”† And after having recited the whole verse with a sort of enthusiasm, she exclaimed: “Oh! yes, behold the blissful life, the perfect felicity; after which we must seek with unswerving faith, ardent hope, and charity.” And with these beautiful words of our Saint ended this great discussion which had lasted three days.

And thus we see that in woman’s humble heart there sometimes shines a light which fails to illumine the lofty intellects of doctors. Purity and love are often vouchsafed ascensions to the source of wisdom, which are the envy of genius. And thus shall it ever be. The works of God have all proceeded from His love. They are, therefore, best comprehended by those who love Him most.

* *De Beata Vita*, n. 35.

† *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XIV.

BAPTISM OF SAINT AUGUSTINE—MONICA'S HAPPINESS—FRUITS
OF THE BAPTISM IN THE SON AND IN THE MOTHER.

25th of April, 387.

IN the intimate and delightful life of Cassiacum almost six months passed away. A portion of the day was devoted to study, and the other and larger portion reserved for prayer and the meditation of the Holy Scriptures.

These six months were for Augustine as an anticipated baptism. He laved therein his soul, and purified it in advance from all the stains which it had contracted, and at the fount of divine love acquired a second and more beautiful innocence. "How I blush," said he to his young friends, "when I look at the wounds and impurities of my soul! Each day I bathe them with my tears. I pray God to heal them, but I feel how little I merit such a favor." Then he added, sighing: "But these images, which my mind has been so much in the habit of dwelling on, still live in my memory. Pale and feeble when I am awake, but when I am asleep they are more vivid, striving to captivate my senses, and wring from me a shadow of consent. Wretched illusions, still too powerful! But Thy hand, my God, can heal my wounds. Therefore I humbly confess all my misery to Thee."*

* Confessions, Book X., Ch. XXX.

When he thus lamented his sins, humbling himself, and striking his breast, Augustine turned toward God, the love of whom was commencing to consume him.

“Now am I certain that I love Thee, O my Lord. No sooner hadst Thou wounded my heart with Thy word than I loved Thee. What, then, did I love in loving Thee? Was it the beauty of the body, glory, the brightness of light, so pleasant to the eyes; the sweet melody of music, the fragrance of flowers, manna, honey, or voluptuous pleasures? None of these things do I love when I love my God. And yet I love a certain light, voice, fragrancy, food and embrace of my inward man, a light which is boundless, sounds which no time can measure, a perfume which no blast can disperse, a food of which the appetite never tires, and an embrace that never wearies—this it is that I love when I love my God.” *

Often, in order to intensify his love, when wandering beneath the great trees at Cassiacum, he delighted in questioning all created things; and this charming solitude, so suggestive of peace and liberty, the absence of man and the presence of God, were an aid to his contemplations, and awakened rapture in his soul. “What do I love when I love my God? I asked the earth and it said, ‘It is not I.’ And all things therein confessed the same. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the living things therein, and they replied, ‘We are not thy God; seek higher above us.’ I asked the fleeting air above, and the whole region thereof, with its inhabitants, cried out, ‘Anaximeus is mistaken; I am not God.’ I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, and

* Confessions, Book X., Ch. VI.

the stars; 'Neither are we,' said they, 'the God whom thou seekest.' And I said to all those things which are about the doors of my senses: 'You have told me concerning my God that you are not He; give me at least some tidings concerning Him.' And they all cried out with a loud voice, 'It is He that made us.'"*

But according as the image of God grew clearer to his mental vision, the idea of his misery, his sins, and self-contradictions impressed itself with new force upon him. He began to weep afresh. "Alas! alas! have pity on me, O Lord! Again my evil sorrows contend with my holy joys, and which are victorious I know not. Alas! O Lord, have pity on me! behold I hide not my wounds; Thou art my physician, I am sick; Thou art merciful, I am miserable."†

Then he raised his eyes to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the refuge, remedy, hope, and consolation of sinners, and exclaimed: "O good Father, who hast not spared Thy only Son, but hast delivered Him up for us sinners, how hast Thou loved us, for whom He who thought it no robbery to be equal to Thee, was made subject unto death, even to the death of the cross. He offered Himself to Thee in our behalf, both a victor and a victim; both priest and sacrifice, and therefore a priest, because a sacrifice. On our behalf He took on Himself the form of a servant, that of servants He might make us sons. Therefore, strong in hope, I trust in Him that Thou wilt heal all my maladies, else I should despair, so many and great are these my maladies; great and many though they be, Thy medicine can heal them all."

* Confessions, Book X., Ch. VI.

† Ibid., Ch. XXVIII

Then he adds with admirable confidence: "Alarmed at the enormity of my sins, and bowed down by the weight of my misery, I had resolved to flee away and hide me in the wilderness. But Thou didst stay me by these consoling words: 'Christ died for all, that they that live, henceforth may not live to themselves, but to Him who died for them.' Therefore, O my God, I cast all my iniquities into Thy bosom, that I may see and taste the wonders of Thy grace. Thou knowest my ignorance, teach Thou me; Thou knowest my weakness, heal Thou me. Let not the proud essay to discourage me by calling my sins to my remembrance. I know the price of the ransom offered on my behalf; it is the blood of Thine only Son, in whom lie hid all treasures." *

In order to participate in some measure in the sufferings of our Lord, Augustine would fain have added corporal mortifications to his tears and exclamations of hope and love. He envied Alypius, "that valiant subduer of his body, that prodigy of austerity, who, as an act of humility and penance, walked barefoot on the frozen ground of Italy." †

But the feeble health of Augustine forbade him the practice of any mortification; he could not even fast. Although the solitude of Cassiacum had proved beneficial to him, he suffered constantly from inflammation of the chest. Excitement and hard work had worn him out; a low fever consumed him. Frequently he spoke only with pain, and some days was unable even to write. More than once the evening conversation had to be given up on account of his proving unequal

* Confessions, Book X., Ch. XLIII.

† Ibid.

to the demand upon him. The soul had worn out the body, and many long years of rest and care were required to restore his vigor.

Sometimes this inflammation became general, affecting the head, teeth, and ears, and causing him cruel suffering. On one occasion he suffered from a toothache to a degree which he had not thought it possible for any suffering to reach. "When it had increased to that degree that I could not speak, it came into my mind to request my friends who were there present, to pray for me to Thee, the God of health. I wrote my request on wax and gave it to them to read, and as soon as we knelt down to humble prayer the pain was gone. But what a pain it was! And how strangely did it cease, filling me with admiration of Thy goodness!" *

Of all who fell upon their knees to implore of God the alleviation of Augustine's pain, Alypius, Adeodatus, Navigius, and Monica, none prayed with more fervor than St. Monica. She begged of God to grant him this boon, in order to inflame his heart with gratitude for the Divine mercy.

And her prayer was heard; Augustine was fully convinced that his cure was miraculous, and his love of God was distinctly increased thereby. The thought of his misery grew unbearable to him; he dared not look upon his soul, covered with wounds, "exhausted, blighted, and dead," to quote his own expression, "and sighed continually after the cleansing waters. Too late have I known Thee, O Beauty ever ancient, and ever new. Thou wast within me, but I sought Thee abroad,

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. IV.

and lost my own beauty in running after those beauties which Thou hast made. They kept me far from Thee, who art the source of true existence. But Thou hast called and pierced my deafness; Thou hast lightened, shone forth, and dispelled my blindness. Thou hast sent forth Thy fragrance, and I have inhaled it, and pant after Thee. I have tasted Thee, and after Thee do I hunger, O my God." *

And again: "O Truth, illumine my heart that I may understand Thy Word. The night of earthly darkness has obscured my intellect, but Thy love draws me to Thyself. Whilst I wandered far from Thee, Thou didst call me, though the tumult of sin scarcely permitted me to discern Thy voice. Now, breathless with haste, I return to Thy Sacred Fount. Let me not be rejected, but there let me quench my thirst and love." †

"O Love, ever burning and never consumed, kindle and consume my heart. Command me what Thou wilt," but he adds, with perfect humility, "give me what Thou commandest." ‡

Thinking of holy baptism, he adds, "I grieve at my remaining imperfections, but I hope that Thou wilt perfect Thy mercies in me till I arrive at that full peace which my whole being shall then enjoy, when death shall be swallowed up in victory." §

Monica experienced in her soul every aspiration, desire, sorrow, sadness, enthusiasm, and holy joy that was felt by Augustine. Long had she entreated God to pierce her son's soul with one of those arrows of

* Confessions, Book X., Ch. XXVII.

† Confessions, Book XII., Ch. X.

‡ Confessions, Book X., Ch. XXIX.

§ Ibid., Ch. XXX.

love of which Holy Scripture speaks. And now that the dart was fixed in the wound, she prayed still more ardently that God would make it pierce deeper and deeper, and inflict an incurable wound. She who had watched so anxiously and patiently by the dying embers within that heart, and had finally succeeded in rekindling the Divine fire, now tended it assiduously, in order that it might finish by consuming the heart of her son. Then burn, O sacred fire, twice kindled by a mother's breath. Purify, transform, consume the heart of Augustine! Make of this youthful wanderer a Christian, a priest, a doctor, a martyr; restore him his virginity; and when Thou shalt have at length consumed this mortal heart, and proved too mighty for this human nature, unite mother and son once more, far from this sad world, in the regions of eternal love and unending joy.

Meanwhile Lent was approaching, and as it was customary for all those who desired to be baptized at Easter to give in their names on Ash Wednesday and attend the instructions given specially for them during the forty days of Lent, Augustine quitted Cassiacum and returned to Milan with his mother. It is needless to add that Augustine could readily have obtained permission to absent himself from these preparatory instructions, but he was far from desiring it. And so this eloquent young man, already so celebrated, who equalled and even surpassed the most learned, was to be seen assisting like a child at all the instructions of the catechumens, exhibiting a piety, a modesty, and a humility that were most edifying. God was as generous, however, in rewarding this great example of humility which Augustine gave to the Church, and twenty

years after he remembered with joy the sweetness which had filled his soul during this holy season.*

At length the time of Holy Baptism arrived. According to antique custom, they had chosen for the auspicious event the night preceding Easter Sunday, which was universally observed as a vigil, the sacrament being administered between the evening office and the mass at dawn. This celebrated night, which was to witness the spiritual birth of the Church's greatest doctor, separated the 24th and 25th days of April, A.D. 387.†

The traveller still visits with emotion the little church at Milan which served, at that time, for the baptistery, and which is not yet wholly destroyed. At the time of which we write, it bore the name of St. John the Baptist, but was afterward dedicated to the holy young man who received baptism that night within its walls.‡

At the appointed hour, Augustine presented himself at the church along with his mother. They were accompanied by Adeodatus, innocent, truthful, and joyous, worthy of Augustine in his genius, of Monica in his faith; Alypius, penitent and deeply moved; Trigetius, filled with joyful ardor; and some others. All ranged themselves with Augustine around the baptismal font. A few chosen Christians had been permitted to enter the holy place, and the eyes of these were fastened on the young man as on one on whom the Church, torn by so many heresies, might count for valuable aid, and on whose brow faith, genius, penitence, and love had

* August., De Fide et Operibus, Ch. VI.

† Possidius, Vita Augustini, Ch. I.

‡ Mabillon, Iter. Ital., p. 16.

united to place a fourfold crown. As for Monica, clothed in the white, purple-bordered robe of widowhood, and enveloped in her long veils, she vainly strove to hide the joy which filled her soul.*

Ambrose arrives, kneels a moment in prayer, and then the ceremony commences. Augustine is seated near the baptismal font, with his face turned westward. At a sign from the holy bishop, he rises and turns toward the east to salute the light so long hidden from him, but which has at length dawned within his soul.† He then approaches the sacred font, plunges thrice therein, and thrice emerges therefrom, as from a tomb, with a cry of joy upon his lips,—the first time exclaiming: “I believe in God”; the second time: “I believe in Jesus Christ”; and the third time: “I believe in the Holy Ghost.”‡

Now the holy bishop mounts the altar, and with his arms extended, prays aloud. Then, pouring the sacred water on the meekly-bowed head of the young man, he says: “I baptize thee in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” And Augustine is born anew to God, to the Church, to the world, and to himself.

After this, Ambrose, in obedience to the custom prevailing in the Church of Milan, girds himself with a linen cloth, and kneeling, washes Augustine's feet.§ Then the newly-baptized is clothed in a long, white

* Brev. Prædicat, in Festo Convers, B. August., 15 Maii. Lect. VI.

† Ambros., De Init., Lib. I., Ch. II.

‡ Ambros., De Sacram., Lib. II., Ch. VII.

§ Ibid., Lib. III., Ch. I.

tunic, symbol of the innocence which has been restored to him.* This garment had been woven by his mother, and it still glistened with her tears of joy.† A lighted taper is given to Augustine, symbol of the chaste and holy flame which will henceforth burn in his heart, and thus attired, consumed with purest love, decked with the lilies of a newly-recovered chastity, and surrounded, though invisibly, with the doctor's aureole, he advances to the altar to receive for the first time the God who rejoices and renews his youth.

No pen can depict such scenes as these, where the profoundest joys are mingled with the most glorious presentiments: Augustine approaching the altar in all the meek triumph of penitence; the aged bishop, the invincible athlete of the spiritual arena, conscious of his declining strength, welcoming the approach of a younger and a greater champion, and rejoicing in the thought that now he may depart in peace; that Ambrose's voice may be hushed, since Augustine's is about to sound; but above all is pen, or even pencil, impotent to depict the emotion of this mother, who, with veiled and tear-stained face, makes futile efforts to hide the immensity of her joy.

It is said that at the conclusion of the ceremony all those who were present were so completely carried away by their enthusiasm, that St. Ambrose rose as if inspired, and raising his arms, with his heart, to heaven, cried out: "We bless and praise Thee, O my God and Lord!"

And St. Augustine, thrilling with rapture, arose also, and cried, in his turn:

* Ambros., *Ad Virgin.*, Ch. V.

† Brev. Rom. Aug., die 5 Maii.

“O my Father, let all the earth worship Thee!”

To which St. Ambrose rejoined :

“Let all the Angels, and the Heavens, and the Powers celestial bless Thee!”

And St. Augustine :

“Let the Cherubim and Seraphim proclaim with ceaseless voice: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy.’”

And thus animating each other, like two ecstatic seraphim, they composed the beautiful canticle of the “*Te Deum*.”

Its beginning is characterized by the ardor, boldness, and impetuosity which we might expect from two saints. In three bounds they attain the portals of heaven. There they rest for an instant to listen to the eternal chant of the angels, and then join with them to celebrate the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose names Augustine has just been regenerated. Then, as if suddenly called back to earth by reality, they change their tone, and, for a moment, their joyous hymn glides into a minor key, and assumes the character of a lament. But directly, their regard is once more fixed upon heaven, enthusiasm again awakens, and the canticle ends in a great prolonged cry of trust and hope in God.

While the two were thus singing with their lips, Monica stood nigh to them, singing in her heart.

She was fairly overpowered with happiness, and nothing could have been more grateful to her soul than the exclamations of faith, gratitude, and love with which this admirable prayer concludes.*

* This hymn is called, in the Liturgy of the Church, “Hymnus Sancti Ambrosii et Sancti Augustini.” And although it is impossible to establish the authenticity of these verses by proofs

When Augustine quitted the little chapel where he had received baptism and partaken for the first time of the holy Eucharist, he was transfigured; so humble, so detached from earthly things, so filled with divine love, that they scarcely recognized him. All his former sadness and inquietude on account of his past transgressions had vanished. One single thought possessed his soul; he silently meditated on the mercy of God, and the admirable manner in which he had been drawn from his evil ways. In order to correspond to these graces, he felt that he needed all the help which the Church could afford.

“Like one exhausted by prolonged thirst, I eagerly betook myself to the breasts of the Holy Church, and groaning over my misery, and bewailing my past life, I sucked and pressed them with all my might in order to

which go back as far as the time of St. Ambrose, still this belief rests on a tradition so old and so trustworthy that we can not doubt its correctness, until we receive direct proof to the contrary, and this is still lacking. “The title, ‘Ambrosian Hymn,’” says M. de Maistre, “would encourage the supposition that this beautiful prayer owes its existence exclusively to St. Ambrose; yet the general belief, whose ground is simply tradition, is that the *Te Deum* was, if I may be permitted the expression, improvised at Milan by the two saintly doctors, Ambrose and Augustine, in a transport of religious fervor, and this is extremely probable. Indeed, this inimitable canticle bears not the faintest trace of work or premeditation. It is not a *composition*; it is an *effusion*; it is the very essence of poetry, set free from the limitations of metre; a divine dithyrambic, the expression of an exalted enthusiasm, soaring on its own wings, despising all the resources of art. I doubt whether faith, love, and gratitude have ever found a truer or more perfect expression.”—*Soirées de Saint Petersbourg*, Tome II., Entretien VII.

find the spiritual nourishment, strength, and vigor, of which I stood in need." *

So deep was his fervor that he could not enter a church, nor hear the hymns which were addressed to God by the faithful, without feeling his tears about to break forth afresh, as at the moment of his conversion. "O how much did I weep," he says, "on hearing Thy hymns and canticles; being exceedingly moved by the voices of Thy harmonious Church! Whilst these voices entered in at my ears, Thy truth gently distilled into my heart, awaking the deepest affection, and drawing from my eyes many tears, in which I found much comfort." †

But whenever he recalled the time in which the same canticles left his heart cold and his eyes dry, his tears redoubled.

It was almost impossible to believe that this was the same Augustine who had consumed and dishonored his life in culpable connections. The sacred waters of baptism had endowed him anew with sensibility, and tenderness caused the exquisite flower of sentiment to bloom once more in his heart. All those delicate qualities which are usually the recompense of purity, became his.

In spirit he already dwelt within that eternal abode of which the Church of his baptism was the type; and at the very thought of its celestial harmonies, its holy chants, the eternal possession of Him whose child he had just been made, torrents of gratitude, love, and holy desire overflowed his heart. "O wondrous abode,

* De Utilitate Credendi, Ch. I.

† Confessions, Book IV., Ch. VI.

all radiant with light, where dwells the glory of my God, how dear is thy beauty to me! How, in this my exile, do I sigh after thee! Alas! I had strayed like a lost sheep, but I trust myself to the shoulders of the Good Shepherd, thy Divine Architect, that He may bring me safely within thy walls. Till then my canticles shall tell me of thy love, and my sighs shall reveal to thee all the weariness and pain I endure in this my pilgrimage; and my heart, weaned from earth by the dear thought of thee, shall sigh but for Jerusalem, my country, and my mother. Naught shall I desire save thee, O Jerusalem! and Thou who art her king, her sun, protector, spouse, source of all her chaste and lasting pleasure, and her eternal joy! No, never shall I cease my sight till Thou in Thy mercy hast welcomed me with the kiss of peace, and clothed my soul in undying beauty, O my God!"*

But great as were in Augustine the fruits of his baptism, they were, if anything, still greater in his mother. So to speak, it was the last stroke of the brush given by a great painter to his masterpiece. This holy woman, with now but a few months between her and eternity, had reached that period of spiritual development in which all that the soul has received from God of light and strength, and all that she has herself amassed as the fruit of her secret struggles with self, of humility, purity, devotion, and divine love, are fully revealed. The close of saints' lives resembles an Indian summer, and St. Monica had now attained it.

We remember how ardent had been her faith in childhood and early youth. But there is nothing so suscep-

* Confessions, Book XII., Ch. XVI.

tible of a more rapid and beautiful development than faith, if we be but faithful. At first the soul moves in a sort of twilight; then the light begins to appear, and at each step to grow greater. God, who conceals Himself from us at the beginning, presently permits Himself to be seen. We perceive Him in our hours of temptation; in our dangers; we touch Him in our sorrows; when all the world abandons us, He comes; He saves us when all is lost. Who has not known moments in his life when God has clearly revealed Himself? And so the veil is rent slowly, until in its last years the faithful soul enjoys an uninterrupted view of Him. It was thus with St. Monica. She had believed, but now she saw. She would sooner have doubted her own existence than that of a God who had concerned Himself so frequently and so potently with her life.

Her hope had grown proportionately to her faith. She knew that God was faithful. All that she had asked she had obtained. She had implored the conversion of her husband, and in spite of apparently great obstacles, Patricius became a Christian. She had prayed for the salvation of Augustine, and after many days, more was given her than she had asked for. She beheld him pious, fervent, chaste, on the way to becoming a saint. And now she was conscious of but one desire,—to enter with him into heaven, and the enjoyment of the beatific vision; and this she was sure of obtaining. No matter how hostile circumstances appeared to her wishes, they had ever been impotent to affect, in the smallest degree, the confidence which for so many years had been silently accruing within her soul.

And so a deep, ineffable peace, of which the peace of her early days had been only the shadow, brooded

over her soul. As on a beautiful summer evening, at a certain moment, all sounds are stilled and all voices hushed, and from the depths of the valleys a lovely, tender silence creeps up upon the earth, so, in the evening of this beautiful life, were all desires effaced from Monica's heart, every anxiety calmed, and all vague apprehensions stilled, leaving an atmosphere of utter serenity, through which shone the one great, absolute certainty of God. A gleam of this inward peace and divine confidence appeared upon her face, and imparted to it a heavenly expression.

And yet neither faith nor hope, nor abandonment to God's will, had grown so rapidly in Monica's soul as had love. But how describe this growth? As a young girl she had begun to love our Divine Lord with that child-like, confiding, delicate, and tender love which must of necessity touch the Divine Heart, since it is potent to move the cold and selfish hearts of men. As a woman, betrayed and deserted, she had wept out her anguish at His feet; and perceiving that all human lovers are deceivers, and that God is the one faithful friend who never betrays or abandons, she felt her love increase with her sorrows, and the gradual vanishing of her illusions. As a young mother, after having tasted, for an instant beside her child's cradle, the joys of maternity, she was soon filled with anxiety in regard to Augustine, and as Patricius afforded her no aid, she turned to God as to her only hope, and for thirty years He was the sole confidant of her fears, her hopes, and painful presentiments. During thirty years she never ceased to utter those supplicating cries to heaven which caused her love to increase, because, to be sure of touching the heart of God, she was ever

striving to love Him more. And now, when she had succeeded, this happy mother shed tears at His feet, such as she had never shed before. Ah! who shall describe the immensity of her love for Jesus Christ! Every sorrow, every fear, every hope, every joy, every anguish, had but served to increase it, and from year to year it had but changed in form to augment in intensity. She passed hours together at the foot of the altar. She communicated every day with redoubled tenderness; and now that the source of her bitter tears was removed, she poured forth at our Saviour's feet those sweet tears which proceed from and are received again by love.

What rendered Monica's soul so ineffably beautiful was that her love for Jesus Christ and her love for Augustine formed but one. They had grown together. The course of her life had developed them intertwined. She could never think of Jesus Christ without thinking of Augustine; her mind had never reverted to Augustine without reverting to Jesus Christ. And what had been the crown of all her suffering, the exquisitely painful torture of her heart, was the fact that the objects of her common love were separated. And now that she beheld Jesus Christ loved by Augustine and Augustine beloved of Jesus Christ, her joy was in proportion to her former anguish. She had then almost died of anguish; it now seemed as if she were to die of joy.

She had already been rapt in ecstasy during prayer—that is, had felt some of those potent touches of grace by which God secures the soul for Himself alone, permitting her to retain only the faculty of contemplating and adoring. It was remarked that since her son's baptism these ecstasies had become more frequent.

At times she was so overpowered with happiness that she would remain absorbed the entire day, silent, and unconscious of what was passing around her, whilst her heart was enjoying the contemplation of God. At other times, this highest degree of joy, which is expressed by the word ecstasy, deprived her of consciousness, and her friends tried in vain to wake her from that sweet sleep.*

This was especially the case after Holy Communion. On Pentecost day in particular, fifty days after Augustine's baptism, she passed into so profound an ecstasy, that during all that day, and the night which followed, she was incapable of taking any nourishment.†

Those who lived with her remarked that since the conversion of her son, the course of her thoughts had completely changed. Heaven had become the sole object of her thoughts, and it was easy to see that she would not long be retained upon earth.

We remember the project conceived by Augustine in his early days when the grace of God first began to act upon his soul. Not yet a Christian, but nevertheless weary of the world, and a life whose void God did not fill, he welcomed the idea of a solitude in which, along with friends of his own age, tastes, sentiments, and aspirations, life would pass far from this sad world in the search and contemplation of truth. But when he strove to realize this dream he found that he was fettered to earth; that his heart was not free, and the hearts of his friends no freer, so he rejected the project with a bitter smile.

This dream revisited his mind in these first days

* Boll., die 4 Maii.

† Ibid.

which followed his baptism. The great obstacles to its realization had been removed. Had they offered him in marriage a young girl, ornamented with all the graces of youth, beauty, and intellect, he would not have bestowed even a glance upon her.* His heart should be, henceforth and forever, God's alone. His friends, touched by the same grace, cherished the same idea. Wherefore, then, should they not essay to realize the dream of earlier days? Augustine suggested this to Alypius, who thrilled with joy. Navigius applauded the idea; Evodius likewise. Adeodatus would not quit his father. There was only Monica to hinder. But what? Monica prove a hindrance! Far from it! She will prove on the contrary the mother, the model, the spur, the intercessor before God, and visible providence of this little community.

And so all concerned agreed, and thus originated the first essay of the religious life which called forth the immortal *Rule* of St. Augustine.

The question was now mooted as to where the little community should establish itself. But this was soon adjusted. Monica, Augustine, Navigius, Adeodatus, Evodius, and Alypius were all Africans, natives of Thagaste or its environs. What was there to detain them in Italy? Why not return to the midst of their relatives, neighbors, and friends, and give to their native land the fruits of their newly-found faith, and, novices though they were, the first ardors of their apostolate? They decided to do so, and toward the end of the year 387, took the road toward Ostia, where they hoped to find the means of returning immediately. What a dif-

* Solil., Book I., Ch. X.

ference between the two voyages! Three years before, each had passed over the same ground, sad, anxious, and alone—Augustine first, fleeing from the mother whom he had deceived, and bearing a heart more troubled than the sea he had traversed; Monica, after pursuing her son through the tempest, determined to rejoin him in spite of storm and distance, and watering with her tears the ground over which he had passed. And now they return over the same road together, peaceful, happy, and united, with their countenances irradiated by the same peace and the same light.

And Monica's opposition to this voyage had been so determined; she had wept so bitterly in the chapel of St. Cyprian; she had so entreated of God to prevent Augustine from setting out for Italy—to keep him in Africa. And now she sees clearly that it was through love that God denied her prayer, and that an Infinite Goodness had directed the event which had cost her so much suffering. These are the things which raise souls, and whose final effect is to make them abandon everything to God,—children, friends, projects, future,—and prompts them to say, “Lord, Thy will be done! Thou art wiser than I, and lovest more!”

St. Ambrose had a last interview with the travellers, gave them a final blessing, and pressing Augustine to his heart, implored the benediction of Heaven upon his journey, which prayer was abundantly answered.

CHAPTER XV.

ST. MONICA DIES OF JOY AT HER SON'S CONVERSION.

387.

SHORTLY before their departure, or perhaps when they were already on their way, for it is impossible to ascertain the precise date at which Augustine and his son quitted Milan, St. Monica fell into another ecstasy, which revealed the direction whither her thoughts were tending, more and more. It was St. Cyprian's day.* She received Holy Communion in the morning, and returned home, recollected and absorbed, as was usual with her in returning from the holy table. Perhaps she recalled, in a transport of gratitude, the night which she had passed in 384, three years before, in the chapel of St. Cyprian, and the memory of it inflamed her soul. However this may be, she suddenly appeared to pass beyond the earth, and beside herself with rapture, began to cry: "Let us fly to heaven! Let us fly to heaven!"

Those who heard her were astonished, for Monica was very gentle, and impulsive movements were not natural to her. Augustine, Adeodatus, and Alypius hastened to her side, but she returned no answer to their questions. Her face was resplendent with a joy all divine, and she could only repeat the words of

* September 16.

David: "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in God my Saviour." *

After this her thoughts were never away from heaven. She had ever, like all the saints, displayed a great contempt for this world, and an ardent longing for heaven. But to quit this world before the conversion of Augustine, to leave her son in darkness and in danger, whilst she went to enjoy repose and eternal happiness: such an idea had never entered her mind, and if it had presented itself to her, she would have rejected it instantly. Her sole desire was to convert Augustine, and until she had done this, no other thought could have place in her mind. But now that she beheld him pious, and with no further need of her protection, the idea of heaven took entire possession of her soul. She spoke of it incessantly; she looked toward it with longing eyes, and like some home-sick exile, pined for her true country.

The journey did not divert her mind from these thoughts; but by elevating her soul, and impressing it more distinctly than ever with the mutability of all things earthly, deepened its yearnings for its permanent abiding-place. Calm, in peace, and union with God, she journeyed on, apparently toward Africa, but in reality very swiftly toward eternity.

If the journey did not interrupt her devotions, neither

* *Pane cœli saturata,
Stat, a terris elevata,
Cubiti distantia;
Mente rapta exultavit
Volitemus, exclamavit
Ad cœli festigia.*

—*Hymn "Sanctæ Monica."*

did it interrupt the prayers and studies of her son. From the time of his conversion he had divided his time into two parts. The first part of the day he devoted to prayer, recital of the Psalms, reading of the Holy Scriptures, and to that intimate union with God, which is the only true happiness and real repose of this world. The rest of the day he consecrated to the loftiest philosophical and theological researches. He had concluded at Milan his Treatise against the Manicheans, and he had already developed in his mind the plan of his Treatise on religion. He had even mounted higher than this, and was already beginning to fix his deep mental gaze on the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. He also completed with his mother's assistance the plan of that community life, so serious, simple, retired, and hidden in God, of which he had enjoyed at Cassiacum so delicious a taste as to make him decide finally to adopt it.

With this object in view, St. Monica and St. Augustine, in passing through Pisa, turned a little aside from their route to behold a sight which distinctly augmented their fervor. The umbrageous recesses of the Apennine forests contained many pious hermits who there renewed the wonders of the deserts of the Thebaïd.

St. Augustine and St. Monica, before quitting Milan, had visited the religious and the holy virgins whom St. Ambrose directed in order to derive from their conversation, and the sight of their piety, some information concerning the life which they were about to establish, and they were now anxious to visit, for the like purpose, these holy solitaries. Unfortunately, we have no particulars whatever concerning this excursion. It is one of the numerous facts to which Augustine alluded when

he said : "I omit much because I am pressed for time. Blessed be Thy holy name for all Thy favors ! Recorded or unrecorded, I would praise Thee alike by my silence and by my pen."

We next encounter our travellers at Cività-Vecchia. Tradition has preserved the memory of a celebrated incident which took place there, and which fully confirms our previous statement of the exalted theological and philosophical speculations which occupied the mind of Augustine while on this journey. Travelling in those days was a leisurely process, and during one of its many interruptions, Augustine, then at Cività-Vecchia, was walking on the sea-shore, and endeavoring with some temerity, to penetrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Suddenly he perceived a charmingly beautiful child busily engaged in filling a hollow which he had made in the sand, with water, by dipping a shell into the sea. Augustine stopped short in his walk, and inquired, smilingly, if he expected the hollow to contain all the water in the sea. The child looked up at him with a grave, sweet smile, and answered, quietly, "And why not ? It would be much easier than for thy mind to contain the fathomless ocean of the Holy Trinity." The spot where this lovely scene took place is still pointed out upon the shore. For many centuries it has been the site of a church dedicated to St. Augustine.

From Cività-Vecchia our travellers journeyed on to Rome. It was impossible for them in the flush of their newly-found happiness, and on the eve of quitting Italy forever, to refrain from a visit to the tombs of Sts. Peter and Paul. Moreover, a fuller knowledge than the Apennine gorges could afford, was to be

found in the eternal city, on the subject which was uppermost in their minds. It teemed with monasteries filled with holy men and women whose number, purity, and stainless beauty of soul, were celebrated later by Augustine. It is an unquestionable fact that they entered Rome. But their stay there was brief, for the winter was upon them; indeed, its first snows had already crowned the Apennines, and Monica feared it for Augustine. They therefore hurried on to Ostia, where they hoped to find a vessel bound for Africa.

They were, however, delayed some days at this port, and during this time Monica passed into a second ecstasy, less characterized by impulse than her former, but in which her soul attained still greater heights. She was seated at a window which commanded a view of the sea-shore, on one of those autumn evenings that are nowhere so splendid as in Italy. The vast, transparent solitude of the sea glowed in the radiance of the setting sun. Augustine came and seated himself at his mother's side to enjoy the spectacle. The silence of earth, the beauty of the sky, the limitless stretch of sunlit sea, together with the wider sense of the infinite which filled both their hearts, in which dwelt a deeper peace than rested on the scene before them,—all combined to gradually elevate their souls and induce a conversation which was not of earth.

“Alone at this window, we began to discourse with ineffable delight. Oblivious of all save the future, we were inquiring between ourselves what the eternal life of the saints shall be, which neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor hath mortal mind conceived. Then the mouths of our hearts opened with avidity for the celestial waters of that fountain of life which is in Thee,

that bedewed and strengthened thereby we might in some sort comprehend such a transcendent subject. We soon concluded that the most vivid joy of the senses in any corporeal light and beauty was not only unworthy to be compared with the felicities of heaven, but unworthy even of being mentioned. Rising on the wings of love toward this immutable felicity with a yearning past description, we ascended by several steps through all corporeal things, and through that heaven itself from whence the sun, moon, and stars illuminate the earth. Considering Thee, O my God, speaking of Thee, and admiring Thy works, we mounted still higher, to arrive at that happy region where truth is the sole nourishment, wisdom the only life; and having arrived there, as it were, with one whole spring and beat of the heart, our souls were filled with ineffable rapture."*

St. Monica and St. Augustine thus arriving at God through a transport of love, touching Him, so to speak, by a sublime leap, behold what is called an ecstasy! How long they remained thus silent and rapturous they could not have told; for in that suspension of all the faculties which is termed ecstasy, time goes by unheeded. Had the rapture endured for a century, to the happy soul it would still have seemed but a flash, the lifting of a curtain that falls again in an instant. From such a state the soul can only come forth with a moaning of regret. "We sighed, and leaving our hearts and minds captive there, we returned to the realm of speech, where our word hath its beginning and its ending."†

After this interval of silent rapture, whatever its

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. X.

† Ibid.

duration may have been, during which Augustine and Monica had forgotten their very existence in the contemplation of God, the conversation was resumed in the following terms: "If a soul were to be still, and in perfect silence, in whom the voice of passion, the vain tumults of earth, sea, air, and heaven were hushed; if dreams and all imaginary revelations were silent, and every tongue, sign, and transitory thing were hushed, and the voice that issues from created things, and which proclaims, 'We did not make ourselves, but He made us who lives forever'; supposing this voice, too, were silent, that we might hear His word, not by the tongue of the flesh, nor by the voice of an angel, nor by the voice of thunder, nor by the obscurity of a similitude, but that we would hear His very voice, as now with a swift thought we have touched upon that eternal and immutable wisdom; if such a thing were to be continued to us, and all other sights of an inferior kind were to be withdrawn and swallowed up, and engulfed the beholders into its interior joys, so that our life forever should be in such a moment of rapture, would not such bliss be that of which it is written: 'Enter into the joy of thy Lord'?"*

Such were the thoughts of the mother and the son. All the heavenly joy, detachment from the world, and love of God, which recent events had amassed in their souls, now manifested themselves in an overpowering degree. Seated at that window in Ostia, hand in hand, with heart and sight in heaven, they contemplated, in turn, earth, sea, stars, and all created things; and finding them too fleeting and insignificant for long consid

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. X.

eration, they mounted together, far beyond this sad valley of tears, into the region of imperishable beauty and eternal love.

"Son," said Monica, gravely and tenderly, in finishing this conversation, "I have now no tie to earth. What I have to do here any longer, or why I am here, I know not, since I have nothing more to hope for in this world. One thing there was for which I did desire to tarry a little longer in this life, which was that I might see thee a Christian Catholic before I died. And my God hath granted me more than this, in that I see thee now despising all earthly felicity, entirely devoted to His service. Why, therefore, do I tarry here?"*

And on another occasion, selected with characteristic delicacy, when Augustine was absent, she dwelt with great ardor on the contempt of this life and the happiness of death. And when Alypius, Navigius, and the others, astonished at seeing such heroic virtue in a frail woman, asked if she did not dread dying so far from her country: "O no," she answered, "we are never far from God; no fear but, at the day of judgment, God will know where to find my body to resuscitate it."†

This admirable detachment from earth had not been vouchsafed her until the end. It was the last and most exquisite flower that bloomed in the garden of her soul; for up to this time, St. Augustine tells us, she had been much concerned with her place of sepulture, having had it already built at Thagaste; even when she had suffered so much through Patricius, her husband, she had contemplated with happiness the prospect of resting in the same tomb. This desire had increased

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. X.

† Ibid., Ch. XI.

after his return to God, which she had been instrumental in effecting. So, before quitting Africa to re-join Augustine, she had made all the necessary arrangements, in case she died in Europe, to have her body brought back to Thagaste, happy to be able to afford the world this final proof of her fidelity, and that it might be commemorated, that it was granted her, after crossing the seas and living so much abroad, to mingle her ashes with those of Patricius.*

But little by little, in the measure that she drew near to eternity, did these thoughts, beautiful as they were, disappear from her soul. To rest here or there, in Italy or in Africa, what mattered it, provided she awoke in heaven? If only heart be joined to heart in an eternal union, what signifies it whether or not dust mingle with dust in the same tomb? Patricius was with God; she was now going thither in her turn; Augustine would follow presently. The rest was worthy neither thought nor regret.

Thus completely detached from earth, with her work completed, as free from impatience as from fear, her heart filled with its accustomed peace, she awaited the signal for departure. It was not long delayed.

Scarcely five days had passed, after the conversation of which we have spoken, when Monica was seized with a fever, which obliged her to take to her bed. At first they thought that her indisposition was merely the effect of the fatigue occasioned by her long journey. She alone comprehended the truth: that her Spouse had called her. Henceforth she thought only of preparing herself for his coming.

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XI.

Her conviction was soon confirmed; for while lying in her bed, engaged in prayer, her soul was ravished in another, deeper ecstasy, while her body lay motionless and lifeless. Augustine and Adeodatus hastened to her side, and were about to apply remedies wherewith to restore her to consciousness, when she quietly opened her eyes and asked, in a surprised manner, "Where have I been?" Then, to reveal at once the heavenly regions she had descended from, and what she had learned there, she added, "Here you shall bury your mother."*

At these words, uttered in a manner which permitted no room for doubt, Augustine felt his tears about to burst forth, but had strength to restrain them. Navigius, who had less command over himself, exclaimed: "To die here! Ah! that it were at least in your native land!" Monica heard him and turned upon him a look of gentle reproach. Then addressing herself to Augustine as to the stronger, she said: "You hear what he says." After which, regarding both her sons so as to leave no doubt of her last will, she said distinctly: "Lay this body anywhere; be not concerned about that; only this I beg of you, that wheresoever you be, you make remembrance of me at the Lord's altar."

From that moment Monica was silent, wholly absorbed in preparing her soul for the coming of its Spouse. She inspected it carefully, lingeringly, in order that the most imperceptible dust which will gather even on the fairest flowers, might be removed, and strove with all the powers of her being, to have faith, love, hope, humility, detachment, attain perfection in her soul, before the coming of Him whom she was expecting.

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XI.

She suffered cruelly, but pain is no hindrance to the transfiguration of souls. On the contrary, it is a great aid. Only love is stronger than pain or death; and when these three unite to purify and adorn a soul, a few brief hours suffice to make it indescribably beautiful.

Augustine assisted in silence at this transformation. A year before, this spectacle, which he would not then have understood, would have terrified him; but now the Christian dominated the son within him; and in the Christian was already manifest something of the future priest. Full of tenderness and strength, he remained by his mother, not quitting her for an instant; alternately moved with admiration and anguish, as he watched and aided Monica with deep, heartfelt prayer during the painful struggle of her soul to free itself from its earthly tenement.

Monica, stronger even than her son, encouraged him by her look. Suffering intensely, but conscious that the end was near, and that but little more effort was needed, she thanked him for his assistance, and called him her good son. And then, beholding Augustine's face clouded with regret at the remembrance of having been the source of so much grief to her for many years, she pressed him to her heart, and assured him that she had never once heard from his lips any harsh or reproachful word toward her.*

Nine days passed thus, and then the hour of her deliverance came. God willed, however, that a great deprivation should be added to the other sorrows of a death-bed. Monica desired to receive the Holy Eucharist, the provision for that dread journey which she was about to

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. IX.

take. But the weakness of her stomach was such that they were obliged to withhold this consolation from her. In the absence of the Body and Blood of our Lord, they placed a cross within the dying saint's hands, and until she drew her last breath, she kept her eyes intently fastened upon it. She prayed silently, in deep faith and utter detachment, in the happy consciousness that she was only going first to a place where Augustine would rejoin her; and from her soul that was departing, like the sun of a summer day which sets in peaceful splendor, there was reflected on her face light, peace, and joy.

It is said that at the last moment, when she was pleading with them not to withhold the Viaticum from her, a little child, like the one whom Augustine had previously encountered at Civit -Vecchia, entered the room. Approaching the saint's bed, he kissed her on the breast, and immediately, as if responding to his summons, she bowed her head and breathed forth her last sigh. Augustine, Adeodatus, Navigius, Alypius, and Evodius were on their knees about the bed "at the moment when that holy soul was loosed from the body," which took place on the ninth day of her illness, in the fifty-third year of her age, and the thirty-third of Augustine's,* and previously to the 13th of November, 307, but on what precise date we are ignorant.

As soon as Monica had expired, Adeodatus threw himself upon the body of his grandmother, and bathed it with his tears. They hushed his grief; for so closely had that death resembled a triumph, that they were loath to mar it with a single tear.

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XI.

When Adeodatus had been quieted, they all knelt and began to pray in silence. But presently Augustine became conscious that he was losing his self-control, and that a very torrent of grief was breaking forth in his heart. So he arose, approached the bed, took one last look at the face of his mother, and then, after having closed with grateful hand those eyes which had wept so much for him, he hastened away, for he was unwilling that even his lamentations as a son should sadden a scene which, as a Christian, he felt should be characteristic of joy.*

The fact of St. Monica's death soon transpired, and a great number of Christians and pious women hastened to the house. The Saint had only been in Ostia for a few days; but whether the reputation of Augustine, and the fact of his conversion and baptism had preceded him, whether the wonders that had marked the last days of St. Monica had transpired, or that, as in the case of so many other saints, God revealed to certain pious souls the mystery of piety which had just been accomplished; the little chamber in which lay the dead saint was soon thronged with Christians thanking God for her happy death.

Meanwhile Navigius, Evodius, Alypius, and Adeodatus recited aloud the Psalms of David. Augustine was seated in their midst, the prey of a twofold agony. On the one hand he felt that the dual life within him, composed of his own and his mother's, had been torn asunder, and the thought pierced his heart to its very core, and caused a flood of tears to rush to his eyes; but on the other hand, overwhelmed with joy at the marvels of

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XI.

grace which had honored his mother's death, convinced that it was in truth her triumph, and consequently believing that he ought not to weep for her, he struggled manfully to restrain his grief, and resolved that his eyes should remain tearless. He says: "A very great grief came flowing into my heart, ready to flow out into tears, but my eyes being in forcible command of my soul, drank them up again, even unto dryness, and in this inward conflict I suffered much."

The less he wept, in truth, the more did sorrow overwhelm him. His tears repressed, inundated his soul, and inflicted on him an insupportable martyrdom. "I restrained the flood of my grief, and sometimes it yielded to me a little; and then again with violence it rushed upon me, not so far as to discover itself by bursting out into tears, nor yet so far as to be discernible in my countenance, but I alone know what I kept close in my heart. Thus was I afflicted with a double sorrow."*

The day of her death and the following one he passed watching by his mother, either praying at her side or reciting in an adjoining room the Psalms, along with his friends, and consoling them in their overpowering grief; even in the funeral cortège he took his place, pale, silent, and dejected, still repressing his tears by a great effort. "And now the body is carried out to be buried, and I both go and return without tears. Neither did I shed any in those prayers which we poured out before Thee when the sacrifice of our redemption was offered to Thee for her, the body being set down by the grave before interment therein. But sorrow overwhelmed me,

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XII.

and with a humbled spirit, I begged of Thee as well as I could that Thou wouldst heal my grief." *

On the evening of the funeral, he essayed some of the remedies practiced by the Greeks and Romans of antiquity to soothe grief, for being yet but a novice in the faith, he still harbored some of his old Stoic ideas, and sought in the bath, followed by a walk, and then sleep, to soothe his agony. At any cost, he was determined not to weep.

But vainly. The following morning, when he arose to find his mother departed, and called to mind the goodness, sweetness, deep and constant tenderness which she had displayed toward him, her faithful service of him for more than thirty years, he felt his heart breaking within him. "I let go my tears," he says, "which I had kept in before, that they might flow as much as they pleased, and found rest to my soul in weeping for her who so long had wept for me." †

From this day forth until the end of his life Augustine ceased not to mourn his mother. He never forgot her. Every day he remembered her at the altar, as she had enjoined upon him on her death-bed. Constantly he seemed to behold her inciting him to have courage in the performance of his duties, and to the love of God. He often spoke of her to his friends, and frequently mentioned her to the people in his sermons.

Once, for instance, in his old age, more than thirty years after Monica's death, he was dwelling in his discourse on the departed, on the respect the living owe to their memory, of the necessity of praying for them, and the avoidance of certain superstitions in relation to

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XII.

† Ibid.

them, such as believing that they can return to earth and appear to us. Suddenly the sweet memory of his mother filled his heart completely, and made him exclaim: "O no, the dead return not; for were this power theirs, not a night would pass without my dear mother revisiting me whom she loved so tenderly, whom she followed by sea and land, even into foreign lands. For God forbid that she, whose love for me passes words, on entering a happier state should love me less, and not hasten to comfort me in my sorrow."*

But better even than this eloquent tribute, do Augustine's "Confessions" prove the deep and tender memory which he retained of his mother.

In this immortal book, written to silence the admiration of which he was the object, and which must have served only to increase it, is the deep love he bore his mother really evinced; and although even here, the desire of humiliating himself makes him leave his mother partially in shadow, lest some rays from her aureole of sanctity might be reflected upon him; we perceive behind his reticence, as through a transparent veil, the utter sweetness, profound piety, virginal modesty, radiant chastity, maternal heroism, and divine ardor of this incomparable woman.

Here we behold the type of a Christian mother, what she can do for her children, and after she has saved, healed, and restored them from the grave of sin by her prayers, the tender memory and unfading gratitude which she awakens within their hearts.

Let us give a crowning proof of this by subjoining the following passages from the pages of the "Confessions"

*Serm. 68.

as a conclusion to the description of this beautiful death. They are characterized by classical beauty, and are the expression of a sorrow which time was powerless to soften, and of a love which separation only strengthened by purifying.

“And now,” writes St. Augustine, thirty years after the death of his mother, “my heart being healed of that wound, in which a carnal affection may have had too great a share, I pour out to Thee, Lord, in behalf of that servant of Thine, a far different sort of tears, flowing from a spirit freighted with the consideration of the perils of every soul that dies in Adam. For, although she being revived in Christ even before being set free from the flesh, had lived in such a manner as that she glorified Thy name by her faith and the purity of her manners, yet I dare not say that Thou didst regenerate her by baptism, no word contrary to Thy command issued from her lips. Therefore, O God of my heart, my glory, and my life, setting aside her good deeds, for which I gave Thee thanks, I entreat Thee at present for my mother’s sins. Hear me now, I beseech Thee, through that Physician of our souls, who hung upon the cross, and who now intercedeth for us at Thy right hand. I know that mercifully and from her heart she forgave her debtors their trespasses; do Thou likewise forgive her her debts, if she has contracted any during those many years she lived after her baptism. Forgive them, O Lord, forgive them, I beseech Thee; enter not with her into judgment, O my God!”

“But hast Thou not already done this? Yes, I believe Thou hast; but these free offerings of my mouth approve, O Lord. Let none separate her from Thy protection. Let not the lion or dragon by force or

fraud interpose himself. Because she will not plead that she owes nothing, lest she should be converted by that crafty accuser. But she will plead that her debts have been discharged by Him, to whom no one can repay what He who owed nothing for Himself laid down for us."*

"Let her, therefore, rest in peace, together with her husband, her only spouse, whom she dutifully served, that she might be worthy of gaining him to Thee. And do Thou inspire, O Lord my God, do Thou inspire Thy servants, my brothers, Thy children, my masters, whom I wish to serve with my voice, heart, and writings, that as many as shall read this may remember at Thy altar Thy handmaid Monica, with Patricius, formerly her husband, by whom—after what manner I know not—Thou broughtest me into this life. Let them remember with a pious affection those who were my parents in this transitory life, that so my mother's last request to me on her death-bed may be more abundantly performed for her by the prayers of many than by mine alone."†

* Confessions, Book IX., Ch. XIII.

† Ibid.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SON OF SO MANY TEARS.

387—430.

ST. MONICA had been overwhelmed with joy in her last hours on seeing the state of piety and fervor in which she was leaving St. Augustine. But what would have been the consolation of this venerable mother could she have contemplated the sequel of her great work, and witnessed the extraordinary development of sanctity and genius of which the life of Augustine at Cassiacum had been only the pale dawn? But God did not permit this. It would have been too much happiness for earth; a joy fit for Eternity only. Let us, however, who seek to penetrate through the mists of history to an understanding of this holy woman, pause a moment to contemplate this marvellous spectacle; and if it be true that it was not only her mission to convert her son, but to prepare and give to the Church one of the greatest of her doctors, in so doing we shall only be continuing to study the mother by contemplating, in all the brightness of his sanctity and genius, the son she left after her on earth. From the right point of view, this picture of the intellect and heart of St. Augustine serves as "a golden background" on which the venerable countenance of St. Monica, in all its beauty, rises in strong relief. The

first idea of Augustine, after he had laid his mother in the tomb, was to return to Rome, but he felt he had not the courage to tear himself away from the cherished spot. He desired also to remain in Italy, in order to retain the privilege of going thither often to pray and seek the light and holy inspirations which a mother, even dead, never refuses her son. He remained in Rome an entire year, continuing to lead there the same kind of life which he had commenced at Cassiacum: the morning being devoted to prayer and meditation on the Holy Scriptures, a practice he continued all his life, and to the composition of several works of which we shall soon speak. In the evening he visited the churches and the holy places which are so numerous in Rome; the Catacombs, where he kissed with tears the relics of the martyrs, and especially the monasteries, where he gradually familiarized himself with the religious life which had been the first aspiration of his heart after his conversion, and which he proposed to institute in Africa. When we read his correspondence at this period of his life—too meagre, alas!—we can not fail to note the ever-deepening ardor of his soul. He lived in silence, poverty, and humility; he sighed after solitude, which, according to himself, is the most favorable condition to growth in holiness. He called death “the companion of love, who opens the door, and permits us to join those whom we love.” We may be certain that the visits which he paid to his mother’s tomb contributed largely to this spiritual progress. They served to detach him from earth and to carry his soul toward heaven. When the year of mourning was completed, Augustine left for Africa, accompanied by Adeodatus, Alypius, Evodius,

and some others, and after having sold and distributed his small patrimony to the poor, he selected for his own dress, and the dress of those who accompanied him, a black tunic girt around the waist by a leathern cincture, adopted the large tonsure of the monks of Egypt, and inaugurated with his friends, at the gates of Thagaste, that life of prayer, poverty, and obedience which he had dreamed of so long. "He dwelt there nearly three years," says his biographer, "withdrawn from the world, he and his companions loving God alone in prayer, fasting, and the practice of good works; meditating day and night on the mysteries of the Christian faith, and by conversation or letter communicating to others the extraordinary light which God had given him in his hours of contemplation."* For the rest, he wrote but little, went out very seldom, and avoided, with extreme care, appearing in public, especially in those cities where priests or bishops were needed. For as his fame began to extend, he feared that what had happened to St. Ambrose and several others whom the people had seized and compelled to be ordained priests or bishops, might also happen to him. But the hour came in which God had resolved to place this beacon on a hillside; and all the precautions of his humility proved useless. One day he paid a visit to Hippo, carried thither by the desire of winning to a religious life a great soul whom he deemed worthy the honor. He was assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in profound recollection and freedom from his usual fear,—for Hippo possessed a bishop,—when this latter, who was a venerable old man, entered the pulpit, and began by

* Possidius, Cap. III.

chance, as it were, to speak of the heaviness of his charge, and the need he had of some young priest to assist him in his labors. At these words all eyes were turned toward Augustine; he was seized and drawn by force to the feet of the bishop, all the people demanding with loud cries and extreme ardor that he be at once ordained priest. The holy young man, utterly taken by surprise, burst into tears, whereupon "some to whom he was unknown," says his biographer, "thinking to console him, whispered in his ear that though he was worthy of a higher dignity, priesthood was a stepping-stone to the episcopacy. Words, these, which only augmented the sorrow of this godly man."* He recalled his past life, and wept to think of the account God would one day demand of his stewardship.

Ordained priest, instead of abandoning his mode of life at Thagaste, he resolved to live in still greater poverty and humility. With the permission of the bishop, he brought to the gates of Hippo the first companions he had had with him in solitude, also some others who had since joined, and founded in a silent, peaceful spot, a monastery, which soon became renowned for the learning and sanctity of its inmates. Hence issued all the great African bishops of that epoch: St. Alypius, Bishop of Thagaste; St. Evodius, Bishop of Uzales; St. Severus, Bishop of Milevius; St. Possidius, Bishop of Calamus, who has bequeathed us a precious but too brief life of St. Augustine; St. Profutorus, Bishop of Cyrthea, and more than ten others, eminent for their sanctity, who founded in their turn more monasteries, and, in the words of Possidius, "breathed everywhere

* Possidius, Cap. IV.

the peace and unity of the Church." In the midst of such men, Augustine, like a star, began to give forth the light which he had amassed during the five fruitful years which had passed since his conversion. Every Sunday he preached in the church at Hippo, invited the heretics to public conferences, wrote innumerable letters, and improvised good works. "He was ever ready to preach the Word, whether in public or in private, at the house or in the church. His writings and sermons transported the faithful with joy and admiration. And his books, which, by the singular grace of God, succeeded one another with marvellous rapidity, were eagerly welcomed by heretics and Catholics, who vied with each other in the ardor with which they perused them; and both alike were anxious to obtain copies of the same. Thus, after her prolonged humiliation, did the African Church raise her head once more, and the Church of the West proudly rejoiced at the sight."* But what was even more beautiful than this unexpected development of sanctity and genius in so young a man—but five years baptized, and a priest only a few days—was the sight of this aged bishop, rejoicing so exultantly, and with tears thanking God for sending him such help, resisting those envious ones who would have—by what law I am ignorant—stopped Augustine from preaching, smiling with humility at those who endeavored to arouse jealousy of his young assistant in his heart, and lest other churches might carry off this potent auxiliary, concealing him in a retired place, while awaiting permission from the Primate of Africa to make him his coadjutor.

* Possidius, Cap. VII.

This permission was accorded, whereupon a noble contest ensued. The aged bishop mounted the pulpit, and announced, amid cries of enthusiasm on the part of the people, his intention of ordaining Augustine bishop; and Augustine refused with tears, alleging, as reasons, the laws of the Church, the customs of Africa, and his own unworthiness. He was nevertheless commanded and almost forced, to accept the dignity, which he regretted all his life, repeating constantly that he was unworthy so great an honor; and only making use of it to teach and defend the faith with more zeal, fervor, and authority. Thus was kindled, and placed in an exalted position, this light which God intended to make so glorious. After fifteen years of error and moral disorder, permitted by God that Augustine might better know the impotence of man's intellect and the still greater feebleness of his heart, after five years passed,—the first at Cassiacum, the second at Rome, and the last three at Thagaste,—in almost perpetual silence, uninterrupted prayer, and profound study of all the mysteries of faith, Augustine took his place at the post assigned him by Providence, whence he was to illumine the Church and the world.

For this great work God had given him, with a sublime reason, a powerful imagination, and one of the most glorious intellects, metaphysical in its character, ever accorded to humanity; which enabled him to go directly to the root of things and grasp first principles. To this he joined a heart of rare tenderness and of extraordinary ardor in love, so that, along with the clear perceptions of genius, he should possess the profound intuitions which spring from the soul and a deep nature. Sanctity, thanks to an admirable mother, had

perfected this great work; and as it is circumstances which awaken genius, God caused him to be born in the midst of heresies, at a time when the Arians, Manicheans, Donatists, and Pelagians multiplied in the field of the Church, in order that by attacking each of these heresies he might be led to explain all dogmas, touch upon all mysteries, defend all moral principles, and erect, on the eve of the invasion of Africa by barbarians, and when darkness was about to envelop the world, a monument to religion, so great, so vast, so powerful, that it has defied the power of time, and survived through the course of ages. The idea did not occur to Augustine of embodying all the great parts, of which this is composed, in one glorious whole. The time when it would be possible for one man, like St. Thomas, to attempt the total exposition of the great plan of God, was yet distant. Born in an earlier age, Augustine acted differently. At different times, and in different forms, he has constructed all the parts of this immense edifice, having amassed about him all the magnificent materials. By properly arranging the different subjects, treated by him according to circumstances, one can reconstruct the temple. It is very nearly complete, and the grandest and most sublime, perhaps, that has ever been constructed by the hand of man in honor of the Divinity. Let us try to give some idea of it to our readers, to organize a gallery of these masterpieces.

It appears to us most fitting to place as a frontispiece all the works composed at Cassiacum,—the “Treatise on the Blessed Life,” the two books on “Order or Providence,” as well as the three “Against the Academicians,”—adding to these the soliloquies,

of which we have not spoken, "The Master," a dialogue between Augustine and his son, Adeodatus; the books on Music, particularly the last, which contains a singularly profound and original theory of God and the Creation; the book on "The Soul and its Origin"; the treatise on the "Immortality of the Soul"; and one other little work, entitled "The Greatness of the Soul," which he composed during his walks with Evodius. In this first series of his writings, projected or written at Cassiacum during the poetic period of his early youth and conversion, St. Augustine examines, under a thousand different aspects, and solves, the three great questions,—God, the soul, and the bond which unites them,—What is God? What is the Soul? What relations, what differences, and what harmonies subsist between the two? Behold the portico of the edifice. Still laden with the spoils of antique philosophy; of the divine Plato, of the venerable and almost divine Pythagoras, of Aristotle the master, as he is fond of terming these great minds; he sets to work to adorn this portico, but employs a method of lighting it which never suggested itself to them.

With what strong mental sight does he gaze into the profundity of God, His existence, His nature, His essence and attributes! He is in turn poet and metaphysician, and, at times, a rather subtle metaphysician, but original, profound, powerful, and ever eloquent. And together with this profound investigation of God, what a deep study of the soul exists! "Nothing is so precious as the soul," he exclaims; "neither the sun, moon, or stars!"* "But whence does she proceed? What is

* De Quantitate Animæ, Cap. XXXIV.

her nature? Of what do her faculties consist? and in what manner do they perish?"*

Fénélon declares that if an intelligent man were to draw from the works of St. Augustine the sublime truths with which that great doctor has strewn his pages, such an extract, skilfully made, would be found vastly superior to the Meditations of Descartes, although the Meditations constitute that philosopher's greatest intellectual effort.†

But nowhere does the genius of Augustine shine brighter than in his discussion of the great question of the relations of God with the soul. The heart of Augustine is here interested, and when the intellect and heart of Augustine unite their forces their power is supreme. No one has better described the abyss which separates God from the soul and the soul from God; but no one has better shown us how to bridge this abyss. "The soul is made for God. The soul is an open eye which is fixed on God. The soul is love aspiring after the Infinite. God is the home of the soul."‡ He treats of all the faculties of the soul, one after the other, to show that God is the end of each. Like a rising tide, all the faculties return to God, like successive and ever-deepening waves; yet is this far from contenting him. It is not only the soul that is made for God; a very little more and Augustine would say that God was also made for the soul. With what grandeur has he depicted God in His abundance, bending toward man in

* De Duabus Animabus, Cap. IV.

† Lettres sur divers sujets de Métaphysique et de Religion, Lettre IV.

‡ St. August., Op., Tom. I., p. 401.

his indigence, as an ocean desiring to pour out its waters, and man, aspiring to God through poverty, as a desert land, craving to receive those life-giving waves.

With what precision with what delicacy does he analyze all the different degrees by which the soul ascends to God; "for," he says, "it is not all at once, but by degrees, that the purified soul can attain to God. Yet the soul," he eloquently says, "reflects on the power and virtue of numbers, and she will see how supremely unworthy of herself and how deplorable it is that she should be able to construct verses and extract sweet sounds from the lyre, whilst her own life is so wanting in order and a prey to passion, and resounds with the discordant tumult of vice. Let her compose herself, restore order within, render herself harmonious and beautiful, and then will she spontaneously and readily soar upwards to the fount of beauty, harmony, and light."* "We must ascend the steps of our hearts, and sing the Song of Degrees."† Then Augustine intones the canticle, and indicates the seven degrees which the soul must pass through. After the first three, which are of minor import, we reach the fourth.

"In this the soul prefers herself, not only to her own body, but to all created things; places a higher value on spiritual things than on earthly goods, and has for these latter only contempt when she compares them to her own beauty and power; and the more she disengages herself from the slime in which she is cast, the purer, freer, and more perfect she becomes. Then the soul makes a sublime

* De Ordine, Lib. II., Cap. XIX.

† Confessions, Book XIII., Ch. IX.

effort to rise toward God, and this constitutes the fifth degree; she commences to contemplate Him, and aspires to the happiness of beholding Him. The sixth consists in action. Here contemplation is not sufficient, it is necessary to act; not sufficient to see the truth; we must be united with it. In the seventh or last degree, contemplation, joined to virtue, begins, to end no more. It is the calm, the anticipated beatitude of eternity.

“Shall I attempt to describe that happy state?” he exclaims. “No; certain lofty, incomparable souls have revealed so much of their own experience with regard to it as they considered it necessary for us to know. But what I can unhesitatingly affirm, is, that by God’s grace we too shall attain that blissful state. Then we shall see the vanity and nothingness of all created things. Then will those grand and marvellous changes awaiting our corporal nature be so clearly understood by us, that even the resurrection of the flesh, difficult as it is to realize, will appear to us more certain than the rise of to-morrow’s sun. Then shall we regard those foolish ones, who make sport of the mysteries of eternity, with feelings similar to those with which we regard a child, who on seeing the faint outline sketched in, can not believe it possible that a picture can emanate from the artist’s pencil. So absorbing and delightful is the contemplation of truth, that the soul, in her holy zeal to attain the object of her contemplation, loses all dread of death, and regards it as the greatest boon.”*

“But if God and the soul are in harmony, if a bond

* De Quantitate Animæ, Cap. XXX.-XXXIII.

necessarily unites them [religio], where is this bond? Where is this religion which must have existed from the very beginning of time, and likewise from the very beginning of time have presented itself to the regard of men in such a manner that it was only necessary for them to open their eyes and find it? This is the question which presents itself immediately to the mind."

Augustine was occupied with this question at Casiacum and in traversing the Apennines, and it was to solve it that, on reaching Rome, he wrote his "Treatise on the True Religion," in which appear the last traces of the Platonic philosophy, which he was rapidly abandoning for a more theological style. This is his last masterpiece in his first manner.

The exordium is remarkable for its beauty and exhaustiveness. "Were Plato still living, and permitted me to interrogate him, or if during his life any one of his disciples had asked him what he would think of a man such as Jesus Christ who would succeed in winning esteem for a doctrine so exalted as that of His Gospel, and succeed in spreading it throughout the world, so that even those who could not comprehend it would nevertheless believe it, and that those who would have sufficient mental vigor to shake off the yoke of error and vulgar prejudice would go so far as to practice it, what, I ask, would his reply be? Assuredly, such a one would seem to him superhuman. For thus wise, Plato would say, it is not given to man to operate such a wonderful change in the world, unless God, by a miracle of His wisdom and power, had raised him above the ordinary condition of humanity in order to unite him ultimately with Himself, enlightened him from his

cradle, not by instructions such as man is capable of imparting, but by a secret effusion of the clear light of truth, and finally enriched him with so many graces, armed him with so much courage, and raised him to such a degree of excellence and majesty, that despising all which, through his natural depravity, man seeks after with avidity, exposing himself to everything which inspires men with the greatest dread, and performing in their sight the works most fitted to excite their admiration, he compels them to enlist themselves among the ranks of his followers, as much by the attraction of love as by the weight of authority.

“If, then, all these marvels have really taken place; if the writings and the monuments in which they are recorded have rendered their celebrity world-wide; if certain individuals (selected from among their brethren and sent out from the only spot in the world where the true God was worshipped, and which spot was therefore the fitting birthplace for such a man,) have throughout the whole earth kindled the fire of divine love by the force of their language and the renown of their miracles; if, in quitting the earth, after thus firmly establishing the doctrine of salvation, they have bequeathed the knowledge of these divine truths to posterity at large; and if, omitting all those past events which some may hesitate to believe, the same Gospel is everywhere preached at the present day; if the people receive it with respect and love; if, in spite of temporal opposition, martyrdom, fire, and torture, the Church still increases; if no one is surprised to see thousands of youths and maidens renounce marriage and profess perpetual virginity; if the universe has become a vast temple resounding on

all sides with the cry of *Sursum Corda* ; I again ask, what would Plato say? And with what admiration would he exclaim: Behold the realization of our dream; that which we should not have dared to propose to the nations of the earth, that with which we could never have inspired them, is believed, practiced, and loved throughout the world." *

After this magnificent exordium, after having shown on the one side the impotence of Plato—that is, the impotence of all antique philosophy—to lead men to truth and virtue, and on the other the omnipotence of Jesus Christ, Augustine scrutinizes in succession all the bases of religion,—history, by which she goes back even to the cradle of the world; prophecy, by which she reaches to its end; miracles, which are the manifest sign of the Divine Presence; the power of transformation which she possesses, for if we can not approach a learned or virtuous man without feeling his influence produce an increase of virtue or learning within ourselves, how can religion bring God and men nearer each other, without rendering man better? And then follows the celebrated portrait of a good man, beside which the portrait of the just man, drawn by Plato, pales, because it is the incomparably beautiful life of Jesus Christ which forms the ideal type of regenerate man! "Men pursue earthly riches with insatiable ardor; Jesus Christ chose to be born in poverty. Our pride makes us shrink from enduring the slightest outrage; He endured the most terrible ones. We revolt against injustice; He suffered injustice even to death. Pain is insupportable to us; He was scourged and pierced with

* De Vera Religion, Cap. III. et IV.

nails and thorns. Men shun death ; He embraced it voluntarily. Nothing is so ignominious as the death of the Cross ; He chose it. By despising the world, He has taught us to overcome the world. Therefore we see that there is nothing in the life of Jesus Christ but is a lesson for us, containing a complete epitome of morality."

We see no reason for agreeing with M. de Villemain in his following estimate of this treatise. "A memorial of Augustine's heart, it was destined rather to mark an epoch in his religious development than to serve as a proof of the truth which he had embraced."* On the contrary, we assert with Arnould,† with Villemont,‡ with Bossuet,§ with the entire eighteenth century which has declared it in every variety of tone, that "this book, as much, if not more than any other of his works, supplies us with reason for admiring the prodigious grandeur of intellect and wonderful knowledge of this incomparable man. For who—remembering how short a time he had been engaged in the study of the mysteries of the Christian religion, and that as yet he held no other rank in the Church than that of a simple layman—could fail to be astonished at the noble and sublime terms in which he speaks of his divine religion, and the excellent idea of its eminence and grandeur which he has formed—so sublime that it is not easy to follow with the eyes his eagle flight ; to penetrate the solidity of his admirable arguments, and contemplate the

* Les Pères du IV. Siècle, St. Augustine.

† Preface du *Traité de la vraie religion*, traduit par lui.

‡ *Memoires*, etc., Tome XIII., p. 139.

§ A. Floquet, *Études*, Tome II., p. 510.

lofty truths which he propounds, without being dazzled by so brilliant a light?"

The sequel to this beautiful work—the reading of which converted Romanianus, to whom it was addressed—is contained in the four books of *Christian Doctrine*, in which St. Augustine demonstrates that all religion is reducible to love, and whose pages, "I dare assert," says Bossuet, "contain more principles for our guidance in the understanding of Holy Scripture than all the other Doctors put together"; also and most especially, in the magnificent "Letter to Volusian," which excited in the Church a species of astonishment, speedily followed by a veritable enthusiasm. Here Augustine mounts no longer on the wings of Plato, but on those of the prophets, to the inaccessible light in which dwells the Word. This Word, this ineffable Word of God, must not be conceived in our minds as a Word that passes away.

The eternity of this Word, His generation before time was, His descent upon earth, His Incarnation and Suffering; His works of light, holiness, and love; the impossibility of any man sustaining a comparison with the Man-God; the Hebrew people created to await His Advent, to announce, to desire it; to keep alive on the earth the thought of His coming; how when He came the Church was born of His Blood, and spread throughout the world, to make Him known to and beloved of all men, and to make men better through this knowledge and this love—all this is treated in the Letter to Volusian with a brilliant eloquence, a depth of knowledge, a charm and a vigor that drew exclamations of astonishment from Bossuet. Indeed the illustrious Bishop of Meaux has taken from it the second part of

his "Discourse on Universal History"—a fact that he does not deny, and which the most cursory glance at the books in question will prove. So is light born from light, genius awakened by genius, and aroused rather to emulate than imitate.

But by what signs shall we recognize this religion which dates from the beginning of the world, and which is to know no end; this Church whose mission it is to bear truth, holiness, and love to the end of time and throughout the earth? This is precisely the question which was agitating Africa at the time of Augustine's arrival there. Led by the course of his studies, and still more by his discussion with the Donatists, to examine minutely that grand organization termed the Catholic Church, Augustine devoted himself to the study of it with a sort of joyous passion. His vast and noble genius felt at ease in the immensity of this edifice, beneath the lofty arches of this sublime temple. By turns contemplative and militant, deeply moved by the light he discovers, but more deeply still by the misfortune of those who fail to perceive it, he multiplies his discourses,* his conferences,† his letters,‡ his treatises,§ in order to demonstrate to all minds the divine truth and beauty of the Catholic Church.

* Sermons 37, 45, 62, 75, 78, 79, 91, 116, 129, 138, 144, 267.

† Conferences of St. Augustine with Felix, Manichean; with the Donatists at Carthage; with Emeritus, in the presence of several bishops.

‡ Epistles 23, 33, 34, 35, 43, 44, 49, 51, 70, 76, 87, 93, 195, etc.

§ Liber de Utilitate Credendi; De Moribus Ecclesiæ Catholicæ et de moribus Manichæorum, Lib. II.; Libri XXXIII, contra Faustum Manichæum; Psalmus Contra partem Donati; Contra Epistolam Parmeniani, Lib. i III.; Libri IV., Contra Crés-

He touches upon, and under all forms, the origin of the Church; her miraculous establishment; her life, in which God's presence is ever manifesting itself; the miracle of her unity; her historic certainty; her Catholicity; using this argument to crush the Donatists, existing only on one small point of the globe; her holiness, which transforms not only individuals, but laws, manners, and peoples, notwithstanding the terrific opposition of the passions. And when he has defeated and brought low all his adversaries, and obliged them to acknowledge themselves vanquished in public conferences; or when in his books he has fairly pulverized their vain objections, he permits the great love within his soul to find expression. The giant throws aside his weapon. He is both maternal and paternal in his nature. In no other instance have there been united, in the one soul, such inflexible vigor of logic and such tenderness of heart.

After twenty years of struggle he makes a final and decisive blow at heresy; he convokes an assembly of all the bishops of Africa, Catholic and schismatic; obtains from all the Catholic bishops a promise that they will resign their Sees, if such a proceeding be conducive to the unity of the Church; then opens this glorious assembly, consisting of more than four hundred bishops, by a discourse on *Peace*, that is pregnant with the tenderness of his own soul; then enters the lists; sustains for several days the whole weight of the argument; obliges his adversaries to confess themselves

sonium; Epistola ad Catholicos contra Donatistas; Breviculus collationis cum Donatistis; Libri ad Donatistas post Collationem Sermo ad Cæsarensis Ecclesiæ plebem; Libri II., Contra Gaudentium.

vanquished; and so terminates, amid the applause of the entire Church, this great struggle, by giving back peace and unity to Africa.*

From this beginning of the works of Augustine the reader may form some conception of the greatness of the entire series. God and the soul, and uniting these, religion, with Jesus Christ for its centre; and as the representative of Jesus Christ on earth, the Church,—what a whole do these make! And yet they are only the first stones of the edifice!

Having solidly grounded his work on the immovable rock, Augustine enters the temple, and, gaining courage as he advances, he visits successively all its depths and all its summits.

God first! No longer God as He had appeared to him at Cassiacum in the light of Christian reason; but God, illuminated by the sun of revelation; God, One and Triune; One in His nature, Triune in His Persons; the Father who is the principle of the Son; the Son eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son; all these formidable mysteries are successively dwelt upon in the fifteen books of the beautiful "Treatise on the Trinity," "commenced in early life, and completed in old age," to quote his own expression.†

Up to this time none of the Fathers had treated these difficult questions better than Tertullian; but in this treatise of Augustine the thoughts are more lofty, more philosophical, more spiritual, so to speak, without

* Cfr. Lib. de Gestis cum Emerito.

† Cfr. Lib. contra sermonem Arianorum; Collatio cum Maximo Arianorum episcopo.

being less grand. Than the "Elevations" of Bossuet, nothing more sublime has ever been written respecting the unapproachable Light in which dwells He whom no human eye has ever seen.

But God comes out of His silence. He creates. How? Why? Augustine considers this second mystery, which is formidable even to the mind which has been meditating upon the Holy Trinity, and which has baffled the greatest philosophers of antiquity. Augustine treats of it in two ways: as a metaphysician, he analyzes it; as a poet, he sings it.

He devotes twelve books to the explanation of the first three chapters of Genesis, investing it, from general principles down to the least details of natural history, with erudition, exhaustiveness, eloquence, and singular perspicuity; refusing to limit its period to the six days, accepted in their literal meaning, and granting the epochs which modern science demands, throwing the full light of genius upon the creation of light, water, air, and, above all, of man, and developing, under countless forms, the theory of creation, which we find at the end of his treatise, "De Musica": "Surprising intuition of the truth of things," says Père Gratry, "which is in complete harmony with the answer which science to-day returns to the great question, What is matter?"*

And along with being a metaphysician, what a poet is Augustine! Poet and metaphysician in turn, and on the same page. Read the last three books of the "Confessions." There we have a poem on Creation, in three cantos, an epee of singular greatness, in

* De la Connaissance de l'âme, Tome I., p. 257.

which, one after the other, all the worlds hymn the glory of Him who has created them.*

But, in the midst of this beautiful creation, exists intellectual, moral, and physical evil. Whence comes it? Has God created evil? If He has not created it, how came it into existence? Terrific question, which had troubled the youth of Augustine, had driven him into Manicheism, and tortured his great mind for nineteen years, and of which he now affords a new and perfect solution. Immediately after his conversion, he had devoted himself to the study of this problem, and never relinquished it. In twenty treatises he now developed his profound and just conception that evil has no substance; that it exists only as a negation, a weakness of will, an absence of justice, as darkness is nothing but the absence of light; that God has not created darkness any more than He has created death, than He has created evil; but that we owe its existence to rebellious angels and disobedient man; and that God, though He has not created, permits its existence because He will punish it, and evil punished will be as glorious a sight as good rewarded. He adverts continually to this genesis of evil, treating in twenty different ways the salient features of this sad poem, the fallen angel producing the fall of man, who drags down with him his entire race; and which would rise from a background of black, utter hopelessness, were it not for one ray of light piercing beyond, and disclosing in the far distance the Redemption.

Having arrived at the moment in which Adam, guilty but repentant, and Eve, fallen, but sustained by

* See also the two Books of Genesis against the Manicheans.

one glorious hope, leave Eden ; bearing in their loins the whole human race, Augustine cries out : " Two cities have been built by love, but not by the same love. The love of God, a love so intense that it defies self has built the first, which is the city of God ; self-love, so intense that it defies God, has built the second, which is the city of the evil one. These two cities are now mingled and confounded one with another, and will remain so until the end of the world. They wage perpetual war with each other, the one striving in behalf of iniquity, the other in behalf of justice. Tolerate the one, and sigh yearningly after the other."

Having conceived this magnificent idea, Augustine composes the most astounding of his works, " The City of God."

In the first book of it, which serves as a sort of introduction, he shows the two cities mingled in the course of ages, subjected to the same catastrophes, struck by the same blows ; but the city of evil chastised by these sufferings, which, on the contrary, embellish, purify, and transfigure " The City of God"; then, in some pages, he embodies in substance the beautiful and lofty reflections, which, fifteen centuries later, M. de Maistre was to develop, in the presence of similar scandals and consternation.

After these preliminary reflections, St. Augustine sets to work to attack this city of evil with the weapons and the vigor of a champion who has been twenty years preparing for this great struggle. Its lying divinities, its philosophies, either false or incomplete, but ever proud and absolutely unproductive, its ridiculous or corrupt follies, its shameful manners, impure theatres, false standards of honor, affectation of virtue, senseless

objections against the city of God,—he lashes all with a cutting irony, and makes visitation after visitation upon it until he leaves not a stone upon a stone of the city of evil.

After which, and having replied in the first ten books to the enemies of the holy city, he begins to treat of the origin, the progress, the fate of the city of God, and of its mingling with the city of evil; how it originated in heaven with the different degrees of the angelic hierarchy; its apparition on earth with man; Abel, a citizen and type of the celestial city; Cain, a citizen and type of the terrestrial city; the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; David, victorious king of the celestial city, and type of Jesus Christ; the long line of prophets rising one after the other to announce the coming of our Saviour; the great Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman powers rising in turn, and in turn overthrown; the coming of Jesus Christ at the predicted time, and His death for man, wrought by man; the Church loved of Jesus Christ, and sharing His fate; exercised by an infinitude of fears, sorrows, labors, and temptations, knowing no joy save hope; how the reprobate mingle in the church with the elect; taken alike in the net of the Gospel, where they swim together in the sea of this world till they arrive at the shore, where the wicked shall be separated from the good; the wicked helpful to the perfection of the good; heresies useful, inasmuch as they cause the development of dogmas of the Church; the ten fierce persecutions waged against the Church without crushing her or preventing her from conducting the elect to heaven; heaven open and containing one part of the Church and yearning to possess in heaven the other; God

prepared to be all to all ; how a separation was accomplished at length between the two cities, and God glorified by the punishment of the one and the triumph of the other. Behold what Augustine hymned, with a power almost superhuman, in the twenty-two books of "The City of God." The whole of theology is here developed in a vast epic poem, which is that of humanity. When this wonderful work appeared, Africa and the entire Church resounded with a universal joy. In his other works, on the Trinity, and on Original Sin, Augustine had had predecessors, who, without equalling him, had covered the route before him ; but in this latest work he had entered upon a new field, and given to the Church the most monumental work yet bestowed upon her.

And while the learned and polished Augustine was uttering these truths in carefully chosen language, for he devoted ten years to the composition of his masterpiece, he tuned his lyre to another key, and sang the same poem in no less touching a manner to the boatmen and poor women of Hippo, who never wearied of listening. Take the twelve books on Genesis, of which I have spoken above, the Questions on the Old Testament, the Commentary on the Psalms, the hundred and twenty-four Treatises on the Gospel of St. John, the twelve Treatises on the first Epistle of St. John, and you have in the form of Sunday instructions, marked by spirit, vigor, familiarity, tenderness, spirituality, and eloquence, the entire great poem of which I have given a synopsis, which stretches from one eternity to the other, *ab æterno in æternum*.

The great artist has changed his instrument, but the same soul and the same genius remain. And yet,

astonishing as are these works, they form barely half of the mighty edifice constructed by the genius of Augustine in honor of God.

Behold, then, the Church built by Jesus Christ; the holy city descending from heaven and returning there. But how can man enter therein? Whence can he obtain strength to live as a pilgrim on the earth, as a citizen of heaven? What is the mysterious force which sustains, elevates his heart to the high standard of his divine vocation? It is *Grace*. This word calls forth a new series of works, those immortal works on Grace which excited such admiration in Bossuet that he knew not how to praise Augustine sufficiently. "This master intellect; this eagle among the Fathers; this doctor of Doctors; the incomparable Augustine, the greatest of human intellects, the grandest of human intelligences; the apostle of Grace; the preacher of Predestination." This constitutes, in truth, Augustine's supreme title to the admiration of posterity. His great glory is in having by ten years of immortal struggle, and in twenty-two literary masterpieces, established the necessity, defined the nature, and explained the mysterious operations of Grace.

He was nearing the zenith of his genius and of his sanctity, when Pelagius appeared, teaching that man has no need of grace; that his will is omnipotent for good, and stands in no need of illumination. Alas! who knew the falseness of these assertions as well as Augustine! For how many years had his lofty intellect sought in vain to find the truth! How far away from God had his noble heart strayed! To what degradation had he descended who was formed for such sublime virtues! Deeply conscious of his past in-

gratitude towards Jesus Christ, the redeemer of his soul, and of all the souls of the human race, Augustine entered the lists. The Church, too, looked to him for this work. "The laity, episcopacy, councils, popes, in fine, the whole world," says Bossuet, "both eastern and western, turned towards this father, as to the only one capable of plucking the mask from the face of this Pelagian heresy, which had attained the highest degree of subtlety and malice to which depraved reason can reach."

To this add the consideration of the union between free-will and grace, merit and predestination, original sin and final perseverance; terrific problems, which wrung from St. Paul the cry: *O altitudo divitiarum sapientiæ et scientiæ Dei* (Rom. i. 2). Augustine applied himself to the consideration of them with an ardor that nothing could abate, and a keenness of perception that no subtlety or sophism could mislead. He devoted the remainder of his life to this work, and consumed in it his latest and best energies; on his death-bed he was still writing. But, above all, what perfect and astonishing knowledge of the mysteries of Grace did he display! His writings no sooner appeared than their celestial doctrine was at once acknowledged. All accepted them and were silent. The aged Jerome himself, bowed down by the labor of his works, breaks his pen, fatal to so many heresies, after declaring that he will henceforth be silent, because Augustine has said all that there is to say. Finally, the Church proclaims him the Doctor of Grace, and bestows on him, as an expression of her admiration, the epithet of *Divus Augustinus*.

And whilst he thus studied as a profound theologian

and philosopher, the nature of Grace, defining its true relations with man's free-will, as he had formerly defined the true relations between faith and reason, for the question is the same, he studied and examined the different channels through which Grace pours its living waters into the human heart. These channels are the Sacraments, nearly all which St. Augustine has studied, defended, or sung.

Baptism, so intimately connected with the doctrine of original sin, has been the subject of his most serious and profound discussions. Confirmation, which was then administered along with Baptism, and which he consequently treats of along with the former; Penance, which he has treated in its character of Sacrament with a vigor and logic peculiar to himself, and, as a virtue, with a tenderness all divine, leaving to penitents, as long as time shall be, sublime effusions which David alone has surpassed; Holy Eucharist, for which he felt so deep a love, and for whose study he prepared himself by prayers of such touching theology, that the Church still retains them; Marriage, which he defended against the Manicheans, maintaining its indissolubility, its unity, its holiness, and celebrating, in some letters of exquisite beauty, its purity, tenderness, and peace, under the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ; Extreme Unction and preparation for death, which he has treated of several times in language marked by melancholy grandeur and ineffable serenity.

We regret, in glancing over these works, that time and space will not permit us to cite some beautiful passages; but we have not yet finished the description of this gigantic monument.

What was the result of this divine irrigation of hu-

manity? Necessarily a divine harvest of virtues unknown to antiquity, which, blooming on the sacred soil of the Catholic Church, and there only, will forever testify to her celestial fecundity. The fruitfulness of those virtues will forever be celebrated in the Church. Augustine has celebrated successively all these beautiful flowers,—faith, hope, and love,—especially love, to which he has reduced the whole Gospel, and which he has so often and so sublimely sung that the middle ages always represented Augustine bearing in his hand a heart. Augustine also treated of the still higher and nobler virtues,—chastity, poverty, obedience, the mystery of souls captivated by the perfect beauty of the Saviour, and aspiring to the sublime bed of the Cross,—whence proceed those virtues that redeem and transform human nature. Augustine points out this transfiguration, already commenced; the individual restored to his primitive dignity; the family reconstituted; society becoming more faithful to the eternal laws of truth; pagan iniquities, concealing themselves from human view, if dying hard; the holy equalities of justice multiplying; and although the world in that dreadful period which commenced with Alaric and ended with Geneseric, was convulsed to its very centre, though society resembled a ship about to sink, and terrified humanity awaited the last hour, he energetically refused to believe that the end of time was at hand, and convinced that Christianity contained within herself resources equal to all her needs, he hailed across the ruins of the present, a bright future, in which he beheld the generations coming, one by one, to lie down in the fold of Christ.

We have thus briefly sketched the monument erected

to the glory of God by the genius of St. Augustine. Every part of it is wonderful, the vast proportions of the plan, the beauty of its great outlines, the quantity of the materials, the perfection of certain portions bearing the impress of a master, and "such a master," as says Bossuet; nothing is wanting, unless perhaps a style less redolent of the age in which the monument was designed. But we must not dwell too much on a thing which, after all, is of but secondary import, in the presence of such genius, eloquence, reason, logic, and erudition, lest we hear Bossuet exclaiming to us: "After that, let who will tell me that Augustine has his faults as the sun has his spots. I will deign neither to admit, deny, excuse, nor defend them. All that I know for certain is, that whoever is capable of appreciating his theology, as solid as it is sublime, will only contemn and pity those who, without taste and sentiment for great things, take umbrage at trifles, and think themselves authorized to speak lightly of St. Augustine, whom they do not understand."

We can readily imagine the delight of Catholics, troubled by so many heresies and terrified by the fearful sound of a falling world, when they beheld successively all the parts of this monument,—to-day, one stone; to-morrow, another; each day a masterpiece; eleven hundred and thirty works in the space of forty years! Surprise after surprise overcame them, and this increasing astonishment was expressed in cries of admiration which reach even our day. And while a species of Christian pride filled every heart, the faithful were moved even to tears on learning that this great man, this extraordinary genius, was the poorest, humblest, gentlest, purest, and holiest, of all Christians.

The scintillations of his great mind were but pale lights compared to the bright flames that issued from his heart. The love of God consumed him; and along with this love existed a contempt for the things of earth, a detachment from creatures, a desire of death, and consequently a spirit of poverty which revealed itself in the smallest things. His dwelling was humble, his bed hard, his table frugal, and his garments such as were worn by the humblest of his priests. "That may be all very well for a bishop," he said, graciously thanking friends who had brought him rich vestments, "but too fine for Augustine, who is poor and the son of poor parents." And another time when a costly, precious garment was brought him: "I should blush to wear a splendid garb; it would be unsuited to my position, and to my vocation, as also to an infirm and aged body, and hoary hairs such as mine."

To this inflexible law he made but one exception; and in this the goodness of his heart triumphed. A young girl had embroidered a tunic for her brother, who was a priest, and joyfully carried it to him. When arrived at Hippo she found him sick, and he died without ever having worn his new garment. Overwhelmed with grief, she made a present of it to St. Augustine, and the gentle and tender-hearted old man, to console her, took the embroidered tunic, and promised to wear it to the end of his life.

In his heart, purified and detached from all earthly desires, an angelic purity dwelt that inspired him with great reserve, modesty, and remarkable prudence. Remembering his past faults, believing and terming himself the weakest of men, he would never receive a woman into his house. He would not even suffer his

sister or nieces to dwell under the same roof; not because he did not love them tenderly, but because female friends would naturally visit them, and this, he said, would not be becoming in Augustine's dwelling. And he was wont to utter the word Augustine in such a manner that involuntarily tears rose to the eyes of those who heard him.

His humility was divine in its intensity. Perhaps no other man who ever lived upon this earth was the object of like admiration, but the more he was exalted, the more he buried himself in his own nothingness. "You do not know Augustine," he continually repeated. And it was to make himself better known, and to silence by this means this universal admiration, that he cast into the midst of the at first startled and presently enraptured world, the book of his "Confessions."

Ah, there is a way of confessing one's sins publicly that costs but little. But when I consider the tone in which Augustine speaks of his faults, when, instead of confining himself to the disorders of his youth, to the guilty connection of his youth which produced the birth of Adeodatus, facts already well known, and which would have read almost like a romance, he searches the depths of his conscience so as to drag forth its most shameful, hidden secrets; when I think of a certain page of his "Confessions," of a certain relapse in which, not only faith, conscience, but honor and delicacy are betrayed and trampled underfoot; when, in spite of oneself, one blushes for Augustine, and then remembers that this page was written by a bishop, by an old man who had attained the summit of human glory, and scattered broadcast by him among his clergy, his faithful people, and throughout the entire Church, in order to

silence the applause that troubled him, ah, then I feel that he has attained the very acme of humility, that nothing more beautiful has been recorded in the history of this heroic virtue.

But neither this humility nor this purity hindered the exercise of authority, nor weakened the tenderness of his zeal. We must go back to St. Paul, or descend to St. Francis de Sales to find a love for souls so strong and at the same time so tender. Like the former, he did not desire heaven if heaven involved separation from his dear and beloved people, for whom he was ready to be anathema. "I do not wish to be saved without you," he cried out. "No, no, my God, I do not wish to be saved without my people. Oh, grant me the lowest place in heaven, provided that I behold all my children there! Ah, why do I speak? What do I desire? Why am I a bishop? Why am I in the world if it be not to live in Jesus Christ, but to live in Him along with you? That is my desire, my happiness, my glory, my treasure."

And whilst his charity and his devotedness thus found expression in cries of love, which remind us of St. Paul, he exhibited at the same time a tenderness, a delicate attention, a patience toward his fellow-creatures which we only find manifested in like degree by St. Francis de Sales. Like the holy bishop of Geneva, he sometimes reprov'd, but always sweetly and gently, ever dreading lest he should extinguish the smoking flax; and let come what might, determined to always be a mother.

"Sometimes," he says, in language resembling that of St. Francis de Sales, "in traversing narrow paths the hen tramples, but not with her whole weight, upon the

little ones whom she shelters, but she is still a mother for all that."

He displayed the same tenderness toward sinners and heretics. Time after time he threw himself at the feet of the governor to obtain their pardon. He offered his life, his blood; he was ready to resign his see. He inspired all the African bishops with the same sublime resolve, if such a step were conducive to the salvation of souls.

"Let us agree, my brothers; let us agree, my well-beloved," he constantly repeats to the heretics. "We love you; we desire you; we will give you that which we desire for ourselves. It is not necessary that we be bishops," he exclaims to the three hundred bishops of Africa, "but it is necessary that we save our people, though this should involve even suffering and death."

And yet all this detachment, this purity, this devotion to souls, were but shadows compared with the boldness, the holy familiarity, and divine depth of his love for God. He would pass hours together on his knees, or seated with closed eyes and slightly parted lips, motionless and unconscious of all going on about him; and it was on emerging from these long contemplations that he would seize the pen, and with it give expression to the mourning and complaining of his soul at the length of this life, its longings for its celestial country, and the effusions of love, with which his works are filled.

"I love Thee, O my God," he exclaims. "Yes, I know it; I feel it; I am sure of it. My fears are not servile, nor my hopes selfish. Extinguish the flames of hell. I fear only because I love Thee. Destroy heaven, my hope, my joy, and my felicity consists but in loving Thee."

His whole life is to be read in these admirable words which were forever on his lips: "Let our life here be low be a preparation for the immortal life of heaven, in which our sole occupation will be to love."

Such was Augustine when age came upon him. He had reached his seventy-sixth year in perfect physical and mental health, and with unimpaired faculties, when the conquest of Africa by the Vandals broke his heart and cut the thread of his beautiful life.

The torrent of barbaric invasion had now for more than a century swept its devastating flood over the doomed Roman Empire; it had now reached Africa with all its attendant horrors, pillage, murder, and incendiarism. Neither women, children, priests, nor churches did the Vandals spare; their course was marked by fire and blood. "The man of God," says Possidius, "beheld the rise and the progress of this scourge with eyes and thoughts far different from those of other men. He discerned far more terrible evil than did they,"—the peril and the death of souls,—and it is written in Holy Scripture, "*that much knowledge and great discernment rob their possessor of ease of mind.*"

He passed the last days of his life in indescribable sorrow and bitterness. He had ever before his eyes the burned or despoiled churches of the priests, consecrated virgins expiring on the sword, or reserved for a worse fate; bishops and priests stripped of their possessions, and reduced to the direst poverty; desecrated altars; impossibility of receiving the sacraments, while countless souls implored and died without receiving them. Inflamed with love of God and humanity, this truly saintly old man passed his days and nights in groaning, and was consumed by grief.

Presently the Vandals, after having ravaged and destroyed all the cities of Africa except three, Carthage, Gotha, and Hippo, came to lay siege to the last, in which a throng of bishops, priests, and religious had taken refuge, as if God desired to unite about this great man the entire African Church, in order that she might learn from him how to endure her heavy misfortune, and with what resignation and heroism Christian nations should die. Augustine wept with the bishops, and mingled his groans with theirs; but his grief had a far deeper source than theirs. "It would be foolish," he said, "to mourn as a terrific evil this destruction of wood and stone and the deaths of mortal men."

At length, worn out with sorrow, and feeling himself incapable of further effort, he said to the bishops: "Brethren and Fathers, let us all pray that these evils may cease, or that it may please God to call me home."

Some time after this he took to his bed, and was seized with a violent fever, caused by the sorrow which overflowed his heart, and soon they realized, with terror, that he was going to die. And now this tender, affectionate heart became even more tender and affectionate. He spent his remaining strength in dictating an admirable letter to the bishops of Africa, in which he adjured them not to abandon their peoples, but to give them an example of resignation and patience—to suffer and die with them and for them.

This was his last work; the dying song of the swan; and most fitting was it for the heart of Augustine that its last expression, on the brink of the tomb, should have been one of love.

Meanwhile, the people of Hippo have learned that

Augustine is dying. The house is besieged. His people beg to behold their bishop for the last time. The sick press about his bed. Mothers bring thither their children that he may bless them. Moved by such proofs of affection, the dying bishop mingles tears with his last prayers. A father having implored him to impose his hands on the head of his child, to heal it, he gently smiled, and answered, "Had I the power of healing, I should begin with myself." But the father continuing to insist, he placed his hand on the head of the child and the little one was healed.

But Augustine's thoughts were rapidly detaching themselves from all things earthly; even the misfortunes of his people were ceasing to trouble him. Borne upward by the love of God which consumed him, yet held back by the memory of his sins, which forty years of expiation could not efface from his mind, he devoted his last hours to the purification of his soul. He had written out the penitential psalms of David on broad bands of cloth, which he placed, four by four, against the wall, so that as he lay in bed, in these last days of sickness, he could read the verses with continuous and abundant tears. "And in order," says Possidius, "that none might disturb this final meditation, ten days before his death he conjured us to let no one enter his chamber save at the hours when his medical attendants visited him." This command was religiously obeyed; and these last ten days were passed by Augustine in absolute silence, alone with God, in mingled penitence and love.

The last hour arrived. All the bishops gathered about his bed, and amid their embraces and tears the soul of St. Augustine departed to the bosom of its

God. Seventy-six years had passed since St. Monica had brought him into the world, forty-three since she had converted him by her tears, and forty-two since she had preceded him to heaven. His old friend Alypius closed his eyes and interred his remains ; and who can doubt that his mother received his soul and conducted it to God !

To a great saint of modern times it has been vouchsafed to behold in a vision the meeting of two souls in eternity who had on earth loved each other with a pure and steadfast love. St. Vincent de Paul saw the soul of St. Francis de Sales descend from heaven under the form of a globe of fire, whilst the soul of St. Jane de Chantal was ascending under the form of a second luminous globe, and as the two approached each other, they united into a single flame which vanished heavenwards.

Something similar must have taken place at the death of Augustine. The souls of mother and son must have together risen, and together penetrated to the divine Centre of their mutual love, from which, happier now than at Ostia, they were never to descend.

But to no mortal did God show this great and touching spectacle. Why should He reveal that which the heart can so readily comprehend ?

He whose heart does not afford him the revelation of such a scene does not merit to receive it from on high.

O Augustine, blessed be the womb that bore thee !
Ineffable the joy that filled thy mother's soul that day !
O Monica, open your arms to the son that is doubly yours, and rejoice forever in the happiness which your tears have purchased for him !

CHAPTER XVII.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE CULTUS OF ST. MONICA—FINDING
AND TRANSLATION OF HER RELICS TO ROME—POPE
MARTIN V. PROCLAIMS THEIR AUTHENTICITY.

430—1586.

WHILST Alypius, Possidius, and the other bishops of Africa interred the remains of St. Augustine in the Church of St. Stephen at Hippo, where they were destined to remain for fifty-six years, then to be borne to Sardinia, and later to Pavia, where they now rest, Monica slept on in the tomb which her son had prepared for her on the sea-shore at Ostia. Those who visited her tomb, even in the earlier ages, beheld there a small marble monument, the origin of which is unknown, but by many is assigned to St. Augustine himself. Who can doubt that during that year of mourning which he passed at Rome, he made many a pilgrimage to his mother's tomb? Who can doubt either that, but for the strict injunction of Monica to the contrary, he would have transported these precious relics to Thagaste and united them with those of Patricius? But we may be certain that, while complying with her request, he did not quit Italy without evincing some care and respect for the tomb which guarded them.

But however it may be concerning the marble monu-

ment, Monica slept for many centuries in the stone sarcophagus which she owed to the piety of her son. Her name was venerated at Ostia, and after the publication of the "Confessions," throughout the entire Christian world. But we, as yet, perceive no cultus rendered her, for neither in the "Universal Martyrologies" of Usuard, Ado, and Venerable Bede, nor in the special calendars of the African Church has her feast a place. It had been decreed in the designs of God that St. Monica should only attain after the passage of a thousand years, to the glory of a public cultus. Why is this? Why does St. Philomena, a martyr in the earliest ages, only obtain it in the nineteenth century, when she has been invested with so splendid an aureole? Why has the glorious mystery of the Immaculate Conception only taken its rank among the dogmas of faith in our own day? Why are there in the heavens stars whose light, the learned tell us, has not yet reached us? These are God's secrets.

In the case of our Saint, however, the mystery is readily solved. A little consideration of existing facts will enable us to perceive why it was that St. Monica slept on in the humble tomb which Augustine had provided for her, the object of admiration but not yet of honor. St. Monica is essentially the patroness of mothers who have Augustines for sons.

Her sweet image had been created by God, that it might at a future day sustain, console, and encourage those unhappy ones whose children stray far from the faith of their childhood. This is why the Christian generations of the middle ages loved, but did not understand, St. Monica. They admired her, but extended not toward her their hands for help. To comprehend

that sweet and consoling face we must view it through tears, and, in those days, mothers were not caused to shed so many tears. And thus a thousand years passed, during which God alone watched over these precious remains. "The reason," says a great Pope, "why St. Monica was destined by God to die in Italy, and also why Augustine left her there, is that if her remains had been transported into Africa, they would infallibly have disappeared amid those successive invasions which, after having destroyed the churches, the altars, the bodies of the Saints, destroyed cities themselves, and made a desert of an immense and fertile country." *

And for the same reason, later, at an epoch which we do not exactly know, but which must coincide with that of the invasions of the Lombards, toward the close of the sixth or seventh centuries, the body of St. Monica was transferred quietly and without ceremony to the Church of St. Aurea, at Ostia, and buried beneath the altar in a deep vault, whose existence was known only to the priests of the church. God was reserving the Saint's relics for other times, guarding them, in His infinite mercy, for ages which would sorely need them.

At length, toward the middle of the fifteenth century, on the eve of Protestantism, which was about to break the unity of faith, and usher in those sad days of which St. Monica was to be a light and consolation, her tomb was providentially opened, and she took her place upon the altars. Already, in the twelfth and thirteenth

* See authenticated documents, Sermon of Pope Martin the Fifth.

centuries, however, she had begun to issue from obscurity. We find her feast observed in many places and always on the 4th of May, the eve of the day on which the Church commemorates the conversion of her son; as though to assure the faithful that if, after so many errors and such long wanderings, Augustine regained his faith, his conscience, his heart; if his genius freed itself from the mists which enveloped it, and was enabled to irradiate the Church with its splendor, it is to St. Monica it is due.

Altars rose to her honor in the old mediæval cathedrals, hymns were composed in her praise, and from the painted windows and frescoes of the churches, her beautiful face began to look down. Already Benozzo Gozzoli, a disciple of Fra Angelico of Fiesole, had depicted a few of the most beautiful scenes of her life, and, in particular, her death, upon the choir of the Church of San Gimignano, and later, some hand unknown, but guided by a great soul, portrayed her sweet likeness above the altar of the ruined church at Ostia. This was only the dawn of a cultus impatient to start into existence. It now needed that the supreme Head of the Church should act in the matter, and formally assign St. Monica her place in the ranks of the Saints.

For this great work God selected Martin V. Few Popes have suffered as did this pontiff. For if his exaltation to the Holy See put an end to the great schism of the West; if he enjoyed the intense happiness of seeing the severed members of the Church reunite, and the mystery of unity, for a moment shadowed, burst forth into brighter splendor, he also beheld the painful scene of the Council of Constance, which paved the way for the scandals of that of Basle. He beheld Wycliffe,

John Huss, and Jerome of Prague appearing. He witnessed the horrors of the Hussite war, and from the height of St. Peter's throne, whose occupant experiences the luminous assistance of the Spirit of God, beside which the illuminations of the most towering human genius and human experience are as nothing, he perceived the sad and evil days which, despite God and His Church, were coming upon the world, and it was at this moment, when Christianity was experiencing those strange and dreadful throes, the presage of dire misfortunes, that by one of those divine inspirations which popes always obey, even when they do not comprehend their full significance, Martin ordered a search for the relics of St. Monica and their translation to Rome.

He deputed this task to his own confessor, one of the most venerable men of that time, Brother Peter Assalbizi, a religious of the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine, Bishop of Aleth, and universally regarded as a saint. Delighted with his mission, this holy man associated with him in the work, the Blessed Augustine Favaroni, Prior-General, who afterward died in the odor of sanctity; and the two, accompanied by a certain number of priests and religious, set off with all haste for Ostia. Palm Sunday was approaching, and they desired that it should witness the translation of the precious relics to Rome.

At a very remote epoch, the body of St. Monica had been removed from its first resting-place in Ostia and reinterred in the sanctuary of the church of St. Aurea, in the same town. Thither the apostolic commissioners accordingly proceeded, accompanied by the priests of Ostia, and having knelt and prayed with fervor, they

first began to excavate on the right-hand side of the altar. Having reached the depth of eight feet, they struck a platform of long, broad stones, strewn with bones, which were possibly the relics of saints, though of this there existed no proof. Here they stopped operations, convinced that they had penetrated into a mortuary chamber that probably had been desecrated, and was now empty, and turned their attention to the other parts of the sanctuary, which they sounded one after the other, but without the heavy iron instruments revealing any cavity within. They therefore returned to the stone platform, and after the most strenuous exertions succeeded in making a slight breach therein, and immediately perceived under one of the stone slabs, a small aperture that had been adroitly concealed, which conducted to a deeper and more secret sepulchre. Filled with hope, the apostolic commissioners effected a descent, and found themselves in a tolerably large crypt, containing several sarcophagi of different dimensions. Three at the right contained the remains of St. Linus, pope and martyr; St. Felix, likewise pope and martyr; and St. Astera, also a martyr.

They turned eagerly to those on the left. Here they found, first, the vast tomb in which St. Constantia had been interred with St. Aurea; then, what resembled a shrine more than a tomb, and which contained the remains of the last-named saint, which, at some unknown epoch, had been taken from the tomb of St. Constantia and removed thither. Above these was a large stone sarcophagus, such as the Romans used for burying their dead. The apostolic commissioners turned their lamp upon this, and, with eyes suffused with tears, read on a leaden plate the name of St. Monica.

The moment was a solemn one. After twelve centuries of silence and obscurity, the remains of St. Augustine's mother now saw the light of day, as did likewise all the relics in the city of Ostia.

In a time of terror, on the eve of a Lombard invasion which spared nothing, especially the bodies of saints, trembling hands had concealed these sacred relics at a distance of eight feet below the earth, in a carefully hidden crypt, from whence they now issued to rejoice Christendom, which had believed them lost, and encourage by their immortal examples the new martyrs whom God was now about to demand of His Church.

After all the priests and religious had prostrated themselves in the torchlight and adored the God who triumphs in His saints, they opened, with hands that trembled with emotion, the stone sarcophagus in which the greatest of doctors and most loving of sons had inclosed the body of his mother.

They found within it only dry bones, which, however, exhaled those exquisite odors of life and immortality which the bodies of the saints usually emit. "From these precious relics," declares an eye-witness, "proceeded an indescribable aroma, which clung to the hands and garments and never disappeared. This perfume was totally unlike any other, even the most exquisite, which any of us had previously inhaled; it raised the soul to God."

When the happy spectators of this scene had spent some time in contemplation and prayer, and kissed the venerable relics, they inclosed them in a wooden shrine which they had brought with them, and hastened to return to Rome.

No preparations had been made for a solemn trans-

lation of the relics. It had been arranged to bring them privately to Rome, and leave it to the Sovereign Pontiff to choose the day for the public ceremony.

But when a saint has immolated herself for God, there issues from her purified remains, as did formerly from the sacred Body of our Lord, a virtue which heals, a celestial charm which attracts souls to console them, detach them from earth, and raise them to God.

So a throng of people, which continually augmented, greeted and formed a *cortège* to the humble chariot which bore the remains of St. Monica. On entering the city the enthusiasm deepened. Palm Sunday is one of the great fair-days at Rome. The roads were crowded with peasants, farmers, and traders from the surrounding country. "At the sight of the *cortège*, these inquired what was its reason. When they were answered, 'It is the body of St. Monica,' they failed to comprehend; but when they learned that it was Augustine's mother, the air resounded with joyful exclamations."* Every one wished to see, touch, and kiss the shrine, so that the apostolic commissioners, religious, and the priests from Ostia, who formed its guard of honor, were unable to advance.

And now a miracle augmented the enthusiasm. A woman, with a sick child in her arms, hurried up through the crowd, which instinctively made way for her. She approached the shrine wherein were deposited the mortal remains of the Saint, and touched it with her sick child, while her face revealed the intensity of her faith. Suddenly a great shudder of awe ran through the vast multitude; the child was healed. From this

* Sermon of Martin V.

moment, the enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. So they reached the church, and when they entered it and placed on the altar the wooden shrine containing the relics of St. Monica, they felt regret for having left within the crypt of St. Aurea, at Ostia, the large stone sarcophagus in which St. Augustine had deposited the mortal remains of his mother, and which was a second relic. They went back to Ostia, and the following day returned triumphantly with the empty sarcophagus, followed by a great concourse of people who could not contain their joy.

Another miracle of the same nature, but even more striking, revealed the greatness of St. Monica, and taught what were the special graces that might be expected through her powerful intercession. A mother was watching at the bedside of her son, who had been afflicted with a hopeless malady for about eight months. She learned what was passing, and in obedience to one of those impulses of faith and indomitable hope, such as influence the heart of a mother, she took her sick child in her arms, and wrapping it up, carried and deposited it on the coffin of St. Monica, then stood at the foot, with heart full of faith, expecting St. Monica to manifest herself a true mother to her dying child. She had not to wait long; the child soon rises and throws himself into his mother's arms, joyous and healed.

These facts, Pope Martin the Fifth declares, during a ceremony which we are about to describe, "took place under the eyes of all. They are renewed daily, and with so much impressiveness, that they ought to inspire us with unalterable confidence in that great servant of God."

Many other miracles marked the translation of St. Monica's relics from Ostia to Rome. These will be enumerated later on by Pope Martin V. We will note only one fact of great significance and exquisite delicacy. Besides the children cured in the arms of their mothers, it is remarkable that the most frequent miracles were the restoring of sight to the blind. "As if God," says Pope Martin the Fifth, "desired thereby, to glorify the mother of that great Doctor who illumines the Church, or wished to honor in this way the tears that admirable woman shed during twenty years to obtain of God that He would open the eyes of Augustine."

Two things are to be learned from St. Monica's entire life. The first is, that she will never resist the entreaties of a mother who weeps for her child; the second is, that of all the infirm, those who will arouse the deepest compassion within her heart are the blind,—not so much those who can not see the light of the sun, as those others, the most deplorable of all, whose intellects, obscured by passion, can not behold the glorious sun of faith.

Pope Martin was moved to the very depths of his soul when he learned the manner in which the entrance of St. Monica's body to the city of Rome had been accomplished; and as this pomp had not been ordered by him, but had been the expression of the enthusiasm of the people, he felt that he had not done his whole duty in such an important case, and ordered that a solemn ceremony be celebrated in the church where the body of St. Monica had been deposited, and announced his desire of presiding at it himself. He came accordingly, surrounded by an immense concourse of

people, attracted by the fame of the miracles which, in the meantime, had been multiplied at the Saint's tomb. He offered up the Divine Sacrifice, and afterwards, transported by a holy joy, he addressed to the religious, to whom had been confided the inestimable treasure of the body of St. Monica, and to the people, who thronged the church, an eloquent and moving discourse, of which we will endeavor to give some idea to our readers.

“We celebrate to-day,” began the holy Pontiff, “the mother of that great Doctor of the Church of God whose virtue, graces, and victories are the glory of Christendom, whose name is honored and celebrated throughout the Catholic Church wherever faith reigns. Therefore, how can we refuse to the mother the praises we so justly lavish on the son, especially when all of us know that the blessed Monica was not only his mother according to the flesh, but far more the mother of his soul and of his heart? The sole end of her constant prayers, the only object of her solicitude, was the salvation of Augustine; and he himself tells us in his writings that his mother often declared to him that her greatest happiness on earth would be to behold her son inflamed with a desire of heavenly things, and despising the false and transitory pleasures of earth. Have I not, then, reason to rejoice, I to whom the privilege has been to-day accorded of touching the relics of the blessed Monica, and presenting them to those very sons whom Augustine has given to his mother? Oh, how great she is! What sublime dignity invests this mother of such a son! Blessed is the womb, blessed are the breasts; most venerable the arms; worthy of all homage is the body of her who has given to the world so illustrious a son!

“Receive it, then, O religious, with a great love; touch it with a profound respect. Let the shoulders be holy which shall bear this holy mother, whose sons you rejoice to be. Henceforth entertain but one and the same love and affection for Augustine and for Monica. And you also, citizens, magistrates, Romans, give free vent to your gladness; rejoice with a holy joy at receiving so great a blessing.”

Having thus poured forth the first effusion of his heart, the holy Pontiff commences to portray the virtues of St. Monica: her gentleness, her patience, her maternal solicitude, which were rewarded by the creation of such a son; “for in possessing St. Augustine,” he exclaims, “what need have we of the wisdom of Aristotle, the eloquence of Plato, the prudence of Varro, the depth of Socrates, the authority of Pythagoras, or the cleverness of Empedocles!

“We have no need of these men; Augustine is sufficient for us. In him, the oracles of the prophets, the teachings of the apostles, and the holy obscurities of the Scriptures are adjusted and lucidly explained; in him are the genius and the teachings of the Fathers and of all the sages united. If you seek truth, doctrine, piety, whom will you find more learned, more wise, and, so to speak, more holy than Augustine? And it is saintly Monica that has produced such a man; it is to this blessed mother that we and the whole Church are indebted for this illustrious Doctor.

“It would not be praising her sufficiently to say that she gave him birth, that she nourished him and reared him, as do all mothers for their children. Oh, no; she has done a thousand times more. Who will not rejoice to learn from Augustine himself the pious custom his

mother had of always teaching him, from infancy to manhood, to repeat the holy name of Jesus Christ, a name which he himself loved when he had advanced in life, to impress on the lips of little children? And what she had so well begun she afterwards, during the whole course of her life, neglected or omitted nothing in order to accomplish. Who could number all the cries and sighs she poured forth by day and by night to heaven in behalf of Augustine, not to obtain for him health of body, but the salvation of his soul? Who could count the tears she shed, the lamentations she gave vent to for the sake of her son? God consoled her by the assurance that the son of so many tears should not perish, and that he would advance in the same degree as herself on the way of faith and salvation.

“From this time forward, her only solicitude was to respond to the divine oracle, always thinking of Augustine, that son promised and consecrated to God and to religion, urged on by superhuman force to follow the footsteps of that son, so as to snatch him from evil and bring him back to a virtuous life.

“I will not here dwell,” continues the holy Pontiff, “on her zeal in regard to her husband, by what merit before God she obtained the salvation of this same husband, so that in her was exemplified the saying of the apostle, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, ‘*The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife*’; and this, in order that no member of her family might be missing in the book of life.

“Who but must admire the greatness of the faith and love which impelled her to follow Augustine over land and sea. And it was not in accordance with the

wish of Augustine that she undertook that perilous voyage ; for Augustine tells us himself that he deceived his mother in the matter of quitting Africa, but that, on hearing that he was about to set out for Milan, she resolved to rejoin him, animated thereto by a courage far beyond that of her sex. O woman, to thee may well be applied the words of our Saviour: 'Great is thy faith!' Yes, great indeed was the faith which urged her to conceive such a design ; to brave unhesitatingly the sea and its tempests, the land and its perils, until she embraced the son who expected not her coming.

“ It is impossible for us here to dwell upon the maternal solicitude and loving anxiety of this brave and faithful woman to achieve the conversion of Augustine at Milan. By what merit, by what renown of virtue must she have attained to a holy intimacy with Ambrose, Simplician, and many other excellent and holy men ! In such relations, her only object was to confide the salvation of her dear son to these men so far advanced in the way of sanctity. I could here relate many acts marked by a courage beyond that of her sex, to bring back Augustine to the faith, but that time forbids. She obtained what she desired ; she beheld Augustine reborn through baptism and the other sacraments administered to the faithful, as if the celestial court, conquered by the sighs and tears of that noble and indefatigable woman, could not refuse any longer life and salvation to her son Augustine ; sighs so continual and so ardent that those holy Fathers, Ambrose and Simplician, were wearied by them, and seemed to send up to heaven the prayer, 'Remove her, for she importunes us by her sobs and cries.' ”

After having related the conversion of Augustine,

his retreat at Cassiacum, his philosophical conferences, and the part which Monica took in them, and having exclaimed, "Oh, yes, without doubt a spirit pervaded the heart of that great woman far different from that which usually pervades the heart of man," the holy Pontiff continued thus: "Having accompanied her converted son to Rome, having seen all the things worthy of their visiting in that city, she set out with Augustine for Ostia on the Tiber, the port of Italy from whence sail was set for Carthage. But for what reason does God will that Monica shall not quit Italy? for quit it she does not; it is at Ostia that death calls her hence. We can imagine her pointing across the Mediterranean to her native land, and saying to Augustine, 'Do thou, my son, quit this country, and return to thy longed-for native land, ever remembering that heaven alone is the true, the immortal country, common to all the saints. Let all thy desires and thy actions tend to its attainment; it is the sole heritage which I bequeath to thee, and there I will welcome thee to my heart. But now God wills that I follow thee no further on earth. Here my pilgrimage is to end, my mortal existence is about to close, and my immortal life in heaven to begin. Be strong in the consciousness of my succor; proceed in safety under my invisible guidance. The happy time shall be when thy sons and mine, after having conveyed thee back to Italy, shall guard us both with pious love.'

"It is thus," went on Pope Martin, "that I seem to hear her prophesy. Yes, we have reached the time foretold by her so many ages ago. How perceptibly are the goodness, mercy, and providence of God manifested in the event which has secured, not only to Italy

but to the entire world, this great gift! Had Monica died in Africa, I doubt whether any pious hand would have preserved her blessed ashes, or if the treasure of her precious relics would have escaped the devastations of the barbarians. No, they would not have spared the ashes of the mother, they who would have desecrated those of the son, the fame of whose learning and sanctity was world-wide, had they not been removed before their coming. What do I say? Even in the very city of Ostia the bones of the martyred saints would not have reposed in safety had not the Lord watched over their preservation. Behold why, for many ages, this precious body remained concealed; God wished it so, that you might be able to honor and respect the mother, you who have honored already with so much piety the name of the son. For my part, I too rejoice that to me has been vouchsafed the happiness of presenting to you so magnificent a gift."

Having thus completed this eulogy of St. Monica's virtues, the holy Pontiff related the history of the finding of her relics, and after relating the miracles which had attended their transportation to Rome, he thus finishes his discourse :

"Receive, then, the mother with the son; serve both as far as you can with equal devotion, for both are animated by the one spirit. Ever observe this day as a solemn festival, and let it as such be transmitted to the latest posterity. Such is our wish, our permission, and our injunction to you. Through you let the glory and the presence of this most holy mother be made known throughout the Christian world. Conduct to her holy shrine the poor, the sick, and those afflicted with any human ill; invite them to seek here aid from on high

and to this end proclaim to the world what has happened in the space of a few days at Rome at this holy shrine. A woman named Silvia was greatly tormented by a violent pain in her head. She had recourse to the intercession of our Saint, and was instantly relieved. Another, called Mariola, sister of one of your brethren, was suffering from a cancer in the breast. By touching the Saint's tomb she was instantly cured and freed from a raging fever that had almost brought her to death's door. A little child had swallowed poison and was about dying. Hardly had its parents recommended it to the Saint when it was cured. A noble Roman lady, afflicted with paralysis and the falling sickness, or epilepsy, was immediately cured by touching the tomb. What shall I say of that woman so many years barren, the wife of the workman who executed the ironwork of the sepulchre? She made a vow at the tomb of the Saint, and immediately her sterility ceased. And of the workman, her husband, almost blind, who besought the Saint's aid, and immediately recovered his sight? And the young girl, stricken with a loathsome, deadly disease, who vowed to take the habit of the women of your Order, and was immediately cured? Is it necessary here to mention all the others who have been delivered from various maladies through her aid, and, in particular, of the many blind to whom she has restored sight? Doubtless she has been lavish of her favors on this class of unfortunates, either because she is the mother of a Doctor who has illuminated the world with the rays of his doctrine, or because, to insure the conversion of this son, she shed so many tears before God for twenty long years. Oh, happy mother! Once she cried out in sorrowful accents,

‘Alas, I weep because my son is dead!’ And now she exclaims, ‘Oh, how great is my happiness, I who, through my son Augustine, shed light upon the world!’”

After these admirable words, which are, as it were, the Bull of the Canonization of St. Monica, and by which the Sovereign Pontiff presents to the homage and veneration of the Church this incomparable mother, Martin the Fifth proceeded to the translation of her precious remains into the tomb that had been prepared for them. It was built of chaste white marble, ornamented with rich and costly sculpture. Matteo Veggio di Lodi, secretary to the Pope, had piously defrayed all the expenses, which were considerable. Two noble Roman ladies had presented three lamps of silver gilt, which were then lit before the holy relics, and have since burned night and day. But in placing the body of St. Monica in a marble sarcophagus, Martin the Fifth considered it his duty to reserve the Saint’s head. He had it encased in a golden reliquary ornamented with crystal, so that the faithful might easily contemplate and venerate what remained of the venerable face of St. Monica. The brow which St. Augustine’s lips had pressed; those eyes, now sightless and dried up, from which had flowed so many tears; that tongue which had uttered such moving prayers and cries to God, and which, still voiceless and lifeless as it was, spoke to souls and consoled them, assuring them that God will never abandon those who trust and hope in Him.

And that the eternal remembrance of that translation might remain in the Church, Martin the Fifth granted a Bull which has come down to us, and which

serves as the seal of the great work of the authenticated recognition of St. Monica's remains, and also of the canonization and the veneration of her name.* The Bull is dated at Rome, April 27, 1430. Yet a little while and Luther will appear to rend the bosom of the Church, to prepare the way for impiety, and explain fully the reason of the events which we have just related. For we can well perceive that what Martin the Fifth honors in St. Monica, and calls upon the entire Christian world to reverence, is the mother of St. Augustine, the great Doctor of the Church; whilst she whom modern times will venerate and display devotion to, is the mother of the youthful wanderer. In the fifteenth century Monica was not yet revealed in all her glory. However, St. Monica had yet neither chapel nor church. Martin the Fifth had deposited her remains close to one of the walls of the little church of St. Trophonius, which was served by the Hermits of St. Augustine; but the pilgrims who flocked thither in great numbers to implore the intercession of the Saint could not consequently surround her tomb.

Mathew Veggio di Lodi, touched with devotion, and wishing to complete what he had begun, caused a chapel dedicated to St. Monica to be constructed on one side of the church, and had her body transferred thither. The stream of pilgrims increased, and in the number of those who daily came to cross their hands on the iron railing that surrounded the tomb, a vast number of mothers,—and especially heart-broken mothers,—were to be remarked. Eugene the Fourth, in answer to the desire of these, instituted a confrater-

* See at the end of this volume the Latin text of this oration.

nity of Christian mothers under the patronage of St. Monica; the first but premature suggestion of that admirable work, which we will speak of further on. Like a flower which blooms before its time, its existence was brief. Nevertheless, through this confraternity the devotion to St. Monica penetrated into the life of the family. Thus the century had not passed away, when on every side the people began to urge the construction of a grand basilica worthy of guarding and preserving the treasure with which Rome had just been enriched; and as if France, the nation for which more than any other, St. Monica had emerged from her obscurity, had a presentiment of all that the Saint would do for her, and was grateful in advance, it was a French prelate, Cardinal D'Estouteville, Archbishop of Rouen, who caused the erection of this church, and by so doing put the seal on the glorification of St. Monica, by conferring upon her the only honor which had hitherto been withheld from her memory. Only, through a sentiment of delicate piety, instead of dedicating this temple to St. Monica, it was dedicated to St. Augustine, as if to afford to this great saint and loving son the joy of sheltering within the walls of his own church his mother's body and his mother's tomb. On either side of the grand high altar is a chapel. That on the right is dedicated to St. Augustine; that on the left to St. Monica. Both are of like form and like beauty, as are the souls of those to whom they are dedicated. Here, at the end of the chapel which bears her name, in an urn of antique glass, shaped like a tomb, reposes the mother of St. Augustine. A brief inscription reveals this fact to the pilgrim:

HIC JAC. CORPVS S. MATRIS MONICÆ,

In the same chapel, to the left of the altar, close to the lateral wall, and religiously preserved, may be seen the ancient tomb of the Saint. It is a sarcophagus of white stone, ornamented with spiral flutings and antique carvings of extreme simplicity. It rests on four lion's paws, and is surmounted by an effigy in relief of the Saint. The figure is in a reclining position, and entirely draped. At the base of the tomb is the following inscription :

IC Δ XC.
 SEPVLCRVM. VBI. B. MONICÆ. CORPVS
 APVD. OSTIA. TIBERINA. ANNIS. M. XLI
 JACVIT. OB. IN EO. EDITA. IN EJVS
 TRANSLATIONE. MIRACVLA. EX
 OBSCVRO. LOCO. IN. ILLVSTRIOREM
 TRANSPONENDVM. FILII. PIENTISS.
 CVRARVNT. ANNO. SALVTIS
 MDLXVI.

The end of the chapel, the side-walls, and the ceilings are ornamented with frescoes, which represent the life, or rather the hopes and the joys of St. Monica. First we behold her with eyes bathed in tears, but with a ray of hope lighting her face, listening to the venerable old bishop assuring her of the future conversion of the son of *so many tears*. Further on we behold again the same figure, plunged in the same grief, but with the ray of joy more vivid, listening now to the angel telling her, *Ubi tu et ille*,* as he shows her in the distance their souls united and happy. The next representation depicts her without tears, and with a sweet and pure joy shining in her eyes—it is the moment when

* "Where you are, he also will be."

St. Augustine announces to her his conversion. Then we behold her on her death-bed, radiant with joy, surrounded by her children, clasping the hand of the converted Augustine, and breathing forth her soul with eyes raised to heaven and a smile on her lips.

Twice have I seen these paintings, and though I was then quite young and had no knowledge of the sadness and afflictions of my day, and consequently no conception of the torrent of tears shed by Christian mothers, and entertained not the idea of affording them consolation, both times did I feel under the influence of those paintings and in the devout atmosphere of that dim, peaceful sanctuary, made radiant by hope, that it was intended as a refuge from the wickedness and corruption of the times, to calm the passion of human sorrow, by the thought of sublime hopes. Moreover, at the very time those paintings were progressing, the times were growing more and more wicked. It was in the year 1566.

Luther had passed away after saturating the public mind of Germany with his pernicious doctrines, which have resulted to-day in either rationalism or open infidelity. Henry the Eighth had died after desolating the fair field of the Church of God and corrupting England by his insatiable lustful desires. Calvin had also died after disturbing the harmony and peace of Catholic France. If we except Italy and Spain, peaceable at least for awhile, the rest of the civilized nations resembled ships struggling with the sea of destruction. The winds of schism and heresy blew furiously over the whole world, bearing the seeds of impiety and indifference. All who were truly Christian trembled with fear. Christian mothers could not embrace their chil-

dren without becoming sad and pale, thinking of the dangers which threatened their faith and their conscience. It was at this very time that God displayed a signal and consoling sign which afforded them hope. Hence the reason St. Monica shone forth every day more clearly before the Christian mind. She began to grow resplendent amid the dark and furious storm, like a rainbow in the heavens.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEVOTION TO ST. MONICA IN MODERN
TIMES—HARMONY OF THAT DEVOTION WITH OUR CARES
AND SORROWS.

1586—1866.

DURING the whole, but especially the latter part of the sixteenth century, in the midst of those numerous apostasies which made all Christian mothers tremble, the devotion to St. Monica steadily increased. Her name, which had not yet been inscribed in any martyrology, was inserted in that compiled by Baronius, by order of the Pope, for the use of the universal Church, and from this it passed into the martyrologies of modern times. Her feast, which was only observed in Rome, and in the churches of the religious who followed the rule of St. Augustine, began to be celebrated everywhere, and her office was inserted in the Roman Breviary. Her relics until now, concentrated in one church, were scattered through the whole world. In 1576 Pope Gregory XIII. sent a piece to his representative at Bologna. The confraternity of St. Monica at Rome also asked for a portion, and Pavia, which was so proud of possessing the body of St. Augustine, wished likewise to have a relic of his great mother, and by the munificence of the Pope, received a rib of St. Monica. The Jesuits of Munster and the Hermits of St. Augustine of Treves also enriched their churches

with some bones of the Saint. And during this time all the great and holy souls which the Church brought forth with such marvellous fruitfulness, as if to show to Protestantism that she was always the true spouse of Jesus Christ, excited everywhere great dévotion to St. Monica. It would render this life too long to relate all the piety and veneration that St. Monica inspired in the great men and great saints of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We will linger but on one instance, St. Francis de Sales—and we must be pardoned this preference. This admirable man, who seemed especially to have the faculty of speaking to the hearts of Christian women and drawing them to God, understood at once, with his great intelligence and profound knowledge of souls, that few practices were more capable of consoling and fortifying them, of showing them their sublime mission, and of rendering them capable of responding to it, than devotion to St. Monica.

Thus, in that beautiful book, "The Introduction to a Devout Life," which created such a profound revolution in Christian manners, he mentioned incessantly St. Monica. If he wished in the first pages to teach Christians that there is no state in which one ought not to tend to perfection, and that it is possible in sorts of vocations and professions, he showed St. Monica in her household. If in speaking to mothers, he wished them to understand that they waited too long to train the souls of their children, and that it is in those early days when they are still at their breasts that it is necessary to plant within them Christian faith and spirit; "look," said he to them, "at St. Monica." Being pregnant with the great St. Augustine, she dedicated him several times to the Christian religion and to the service and

glory of God. Thus he himself testifies, saying that he had already known the goodness of God while in his mother's womb. "This is very good advice to Christian mothers," added he, "to offer to the Divine Majesty, even before it is born, the fruit of their womb."

It is when these children commence to grow up and the bad passions appear, that the mothers have need of a vigilance and firmness almost divine, to enable them to escape their peril; if they wish to learn to defend, to protect, to save, and resuscitate the souls of their children, it is still to St. Monica they must turn. St. Monica combated the bad inclinations of her son Augustine with so much fervor and constancy that, having followed him by land and sea, she at length obtained his conversion, and thus made him more the child of her womb. St. Francis de Sales speaks thus in a book intended for the public; he repeats it in a thousand forms in his letters. If he met "one of those married women who are like exiles in the world, who, having given all their affection, and not having had any in return, have felt in their hearts that immense void which calls for God, and burning now with only His love, look with envy at the religious behind their grating: I wish," said he to them, "that in place of that, you would consider how many saints, men and women, have been found in your state of life who have endured it with sweetness and resignation. St. Monica, for example. That should encourage you, and recommend yourselves to her prayers." Does he meet an uneasy mother, disturbed, trembling about what is going to happen, as is so many a mother? Does he meet them overwhelmed by cruel treatment, of which there is so much in this world? He speaks a few words to them in clear

and penetrating accents, which already give them hope and consolation. "Pray, pray, and then read the life of St. Monica. There you will see the care she took of her Augustine, and these things will console you." But it was especially in his able and instructive counsel of St. Chantal, as I have already said, that we must seek for his estimate of St. Monica.

Madame de Chantal was thirty years old; had four little children, and a large fortune. She was much attracted by perfection, but without any idea of a religious life, of which she had never even thought. On the contrary, she was entirely occupied in bringing her little family up well; and, already uneasy about her son, who, with many fine qualities, had the germs of great defects, and who, very soon carried away by the fury of his passions, the originality of his character, the perilous flattery of his friends, and the impulses of his heart, was about to cause her precisely the same sorrow that to-day fills the hearts of so many Christian mothers.

St. Francis de Sales, who no more than herself had ever thought of Madame de Chantal becoming a religious, and who, not having the least suspicion of it, worked only to make her a true mother and widow, commenced in the beginning of his direction to recommend solitude, meditation, and flight from the world. For the rest, the trials and sorrows of her life made her feel inclined to take this advice. He desired her to pass her time at home with her four children, and thus, completely absorbed by them, to make of her chateau a little monastery full of peace and silence, in which, forgotten by the world, she should think only of heaven. In this little monastery there should be an Abbess; this would be the Blessed Virgin. She should preside. Madame

de Chantal was to work at her feet, and in her company to obey her as a mother, seeking each day her benediction and her orders. By kissing the feet of her statue, or looking at her image, she seemed to gain her permissions.

Such ideas as these filled all the letters of St. Francis de Sales to Madame de Chantal while she was in the world. "Courage, my daughter," wrote he to her one day; "stay very near your holy Abbess, and beg of her without ceasing that you may be able to live, die, and rise again in the love of her Child." And again, "Take great care of the cloister of your monastery, and do not let your thoughts wander out of it here or there, for this is only a distraction of the heart. Observe your rules well, and believe truly that the Son of Madame your Abbess will be all yours." And again on Christmas-day: "My God, my daughter, I wish you were in Bethlehem now, near your holy Abbess. Ask her for Him, she will give Him to you; and having Him, steal from Him secretly one of those little drops that are in His eyes; it is marvellous how potent this liquid is to cure all sorts of heartaches."

But when one enters a monastery, one is young and a novice; and one has need of some one to train her in the way of a perfect life. One has not only an Abbess whom she obeys like God, but she has a mistress of novices who follows her more closely, watches her slightest step, warns and corrects, and directs her toward virtue. Ah, well; who should be the mistress of Madame de Chantal, who would teach her to be a true widow, a true mother, a true woman of the world, appearing in it without loving it, and quitting it without regret, after the manner of the ancient Christians?—who but St Monica.

Do you know under what circumstances St. Francis de Sales gave St. Monica to Madame de Chantal for a mistress? It was at the time when he wished the thought of leaving the world and becoming a religious to spring from her own heart independent of his advice. He showed her St. Monica, as if to say: You are seeking perfection; behold it, has she left her son? And is she not devoted to him? Has she not drawn him to a higher degree of virtue? I give her to you for your mistress.

But I will give you his own words: he never loses the charm of his style. "The desire you have, as you say, to give up all worldly recreations can not but be good," wrote he to her one day, "since it does not mar your perfect peace of mind, or make you unhappy. But have patience; we will speak of this next year, if God preserve us here below. That will suffice. I also have not replied to your wish of leaving the country, and serving in a religious novitiate. All that, my dear child, is too important to be treated in this letter; there is time enough. In waiting, you will fulfil your duty, not by great or large works, for your hands are not fitted for them, but only by practicing within your little circle, humility, patience, subjection, sweetness of heart, resignation, simplicity, charity to the poor sick, and comforting the sorrowful; all these things can enter into your work, and your fingers can manage them in the company of St. Monica, who sits at the feet of your Abbess."

After this St. Francis de Sales did not separate them any more. "Live joyously in the love of God," wrote he to her, "and very humbly salute in my name your Abbess and your mistress"; and again, "Live, my dear

child, with the sweet Jesus and your Abbess, amid darkness, nails, thorns, and dereliction, with your mistress." And in another place, "I wish a thousand graces to your little boys and girls, whom I look on as mine in Our Lord. These are the words of Italice, your mistress, to her spiritual daughter." And later yet, when her son went astray, and the mother's heart was so cruelly pierced by profound sorrow: "Look at your mistress," wrote he to her, "and read her life; she will console you."

And when, after the death of St. Francis de Sales, Madame de Chantal saw her son wandering farther and farther from grace, and was one day overwhelmed by the thought that he was perhaps going to be killed in a duel, and the still more intolerable one, that he was about to perish in the wrath of God, when she was on her knees at the foot of the altar, pouring out her ardent soul to God, and confiding to Him all her sorrows, she heard a voice which startled her; it was the voice of St. Francis de Sales, which, coming from the tomb, or rather descending from heaven, said to her, "Read the eighth book of the Confessions of St. Augustine." She read it, and wet the sublime pages with her tears, when she saw how Augustine was saved by the tears of his mother; she felt the consoling presentiment that she should also save her Celsus-Benignus by the power of tears, prayer, and immolation of self. Since that time she had the most tender love for St. Monica. She counseled every one to practice this devotion, and encouraged it everywhere. And it is even said that, wishing to resemble her in death as she had always tried to copy her in life, when her last hours had come, she desired that the description of the

death of St. Monica be read to her. And when they came to the passage where it said it mattered little to St. Monica that she died far from her native land, Madame de Chantal pressed the hand of her friend, Madame de Montmorency, and looking at her, graciously said, "That is for me"; and dying far from her dear Anncy, she united her soul in its last sentiment with that of her dear mistress.

That which St. Francis de Sales and St. Chantal did to extend and propagate the devotion to St. Monica, was done by all the great saints of this era, more or less; and their words, born of the same thoughts, awoke everywhere the same echoes. And thus as the times grew more sad, and one heard of the great increase of impiety which frightened Bossuet, and made Fénelon tremble, one saw the weeping mothers raise their eyes to St. Monica, and press around her altars; and it is only fair to confess that nothing was more capable of consoling, fortifying, and fitting them with hope than the sight of this happy mother pressing to her heart the son she had saved by her tears. In the nineteenth century, however, the devotion to St. Monica began more especially to bloom. Amid all its misfortunes this age had one that surpassed all others. There reappeared, all at once, a horrible phenomenon that the world had known but once before for an instant only, and at which pagan antiquity would have been terrified. Men without a God, without altars, prayers, adoration, or devotion; young men who, at the age of sixteen, abandoned the faith of their childhood, and sometimes went down to the tomb without asking themselves if they had a soul, or if they owed anything to the God who had created them; intellects, from an earthly point of view,

most rich; but, regarded from a heavenly point, poor indeed; possessing no faith, experiencing no hope; knowing neither love, happiness, nor noble aspirations pursuing sadly their road, in utter ignorance of what it would terminate in. But there generally performed the life-journey alongside of these men, a mother, a wife, a daughter, or a sister, who both knew and saw the inevitable and terrible end, whose sight overwhelmed her with horror!

During half a century this wave of sadness was quietly filling their hearts; then came a day when the measure, being full, it overflowed at the foot of the altar. This was the 1st of May, 1850. On that day some mothers, who were more frightened than the rest, or who felt their sorrows more keenly than the others, met in an humble chapel in Paris,—the Chapel of Notre Dame de Sion. They came to assist one of the best priests of the time, and remembering the words of Jesus Christ: "If two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be in the midst of them," they resolved to render them more powerful; to mingle their tears in common. To this end they composed a little prayer for their children, and promised themselves to recite it every day; and they spent one day in each month at the foot of the altar in this chapel. One thus sees how profoundly this pious association responded to the wants of the age; for though scarcely born, its growth was most rapid.

Four years had not passed away, and already, at the commencement of the year 1854, it was established at Lille, Amiens, Nantes, Versailles, Cambrai, Valenciennes, and, before the close of the year, it flourished at Belley, Fréjus, Toulon, Bordeaux, Tours,

Coutances, Rouen, and Bayeux. It even passed over the frontier, and appeared in England and Belgium.

The year 1855 was more fruitful still than 1854. The young association extended its branches to Constantinople, Jerusalem, Pondichéry, the island of Maurice in Africa, Martinique, Sidney, in Oceanica; and, while it was thus throwing its branches across the sea, it planted its roots firmly in Europe, but more particularly in France, London, Dublin, Liverpool, Stockholm, St. Petersburg, Odessa, Vienna, Stuttgart, Friburg, the Hague, Bologne, Turin, Madrid, Chambery, Florence; and in France, Lyons, Bordeaux, Orleans, Amiens, and Rouen became the centres from which the work spread into the smaller cities, and even into the villages.

Finally, six years had passed,—six years, it is true, of silence, humility, prayer, and tears, of fruitful tears that flow silently,—when the sovereign Pontiff, Pius IX., seeing what this work of yesterday had accomplished, saluted it with tenderness, as we greet the rainbow after a storm.

One can not but feel deeply moved when he sees the humble origin of this great work; but it is thus that God does all that He does. If any one had told the little working-women of Lyons that the pennies they begged from door to door for the Propagation of the Faith would amount to millions, they would have smiled. If any one had said to the poor students of the Latin quarter, who one day bound themselves together for the service of the poor, that they were but the advance guard of an immense charitable army which would soon surround the whole earth, they would have been astonished. If any one had predicted to the

Founder of the "Little Sisters of the Poor" that before her death she would be unable to count her children, she would have deemed it incredible.

All this was made so, as if man, intoxicated in this age with his power because he had constructed railroads and invented electric telegraphs, believed he could surpass God, and God in His turn, took pleasure in outrivaling man and all human forces. At this time, when the Christian mothers were united in prayer for their wayward sons, it was impossible that the sweet and consoling presence of St. Monica should not hover near their reunions. One could choose between six or seven patrons of the association. St. Monica had been only in the last place. By and by she began to advance; she came gradually out of the shadow; she rose to the horizon; and shone with so sweet and pure a light near the Blessed Virgin, whom no star in the heaven of sanctity can equal, that St. Monica became the first confidant, the patroness, the refuge, the sanctuary, and the great protectress of all these Christian women.

In the early days one had a striking example of this. The Sovereign Pontiff, having deigned by an apostolic brief of the date of May 11, 1856, to elevate to the dignity of an arch-confraternity this association of Christian mothers, Mgr. Sibour, then archbishop of Paris, assembled these ladies in the chapel of Notre Dame de Sion, to notify them of this favor, and to address them in a discourse, of which we wish to quote but a few sentences, for it was all condensed into these words: "Ladies, if you wish to become true Christian mothers, fix your eyes on St. Monica."

"Yes," said he to them, "follow the example of this

holy mother, who, by her prayers, brought back her son to pious ways, and by the grace of God made him a great saint. Alas! perhaps you also have wept over the waywardness of a son. Ah, well, do not despair; invoke St. Monica; imitate her. It is impossible that the mother of St. Augustine can not recall, amid the joy of heaven, the solicitude she herself felt once upon earth; it is impossible that she will not take pity on your heart, and that she will not obtain for you the conversion of your well-beloved son, or his perseverance in virtue." And, continuing in this manner, M. Sibour displayed to these pious women the whole life of Saint Monica, her uneasiness, her sadness, her bitter sorrows, her agonized prayers; and, after the conversion of her son, her ineffable joy, her happy death, and the consummation in heaven of so admirable a life.

Then, addressing the mothers: "Tell me, ladies, who does not understand a similar existence, who does not share in such sentiments? Who is she who, if her son is lost, does not supplicate God, like Monica, to convert him? And seeing him return to God, to faith, to virtue, who is she who would not live with her son detached from this sad world; to go to that place where there is no more error, no more wandering, no more sin; where no enemy can penetrate, and where one is forever surrounded by happiness."

He exhorted them to merit this happiness, that they might one day sigh with St. Monica, looking toward their eternal home, and say: What have I to do here below? I have finished my task. One can not better inaugurate the association of Christian mothers, nor better describe the sentiments that filled their hearts. Since then, the association has made great progress;

but I think it is almost useless to describe it. I will only add to the names of the preceding cities those of Geneva, Algiers, Santiago, Buenos-Ayres, Pondichéry and the Indies. Everywhere the name of St. Monica and the remembrance of her tears hovered about these meetings; not a priest spoke a word, not a bishop presided without this blessed name rising to his lips. I have read a certain number of discoveries and letters relative to the work of these Christian mothers. I have everywhere heard the cries of joy and hope at the sight of these great assemblies of Christian mothers, and also heard their ardent prayers; and, if I dare to say it, the wishes of happiness to that incomparable mother, whose face, now desolate, now radiant, looked down on these assemblies, and was at the same time their hope, their joy, and their consolation.

Yes, this gentle star rose in the horizon; preceding ages had known it but little. They were not unfortunate enough for that. God had made it for us. To-day it came out of the shadow and threw its light on the Christian mothers; it dried the tears from their eyes; it smoothed the sorrows from their hearts; it surmounted invincible obstacles by the joyous hopes in their prayers.

Without doubt, better days were coming; God himself was touched; He had compassion on sixty thousand Christian mothers who, on their knees, were weeping for their sons. He who at another time pitied so profoundly the widow of Nain, when in tears she followed the bier of her son, would not now let a generation of young men perish, bedewed with their mothers' tears.

Finish your work, O Monica, and while in the bliss of heaven you clasp in your arms that son of which you have been twice the mother, cast your eyes on the many

Christian mothers who, here below, are accomplishing that hard and noble mission which you have completed; sustain them in those supreme trials through which God wishes them to pass in order to merit the salvation of their sons. Do not let them fail, oh, happy mother; smile on their tears, and let them learn in listening to your life that the evil flame which sometimes consumes the children's souls, is vanquished and conquered by the sacred fire that springs from a mother's heart. As for me, who have with so much love sought out the almost effaced traces of your passage through this world; O incomparable woman, though the attempt may not be successful, I have found a light I did not look for. In showing me your heart, O Monica, you have revealed to me what mine ought to contain. Thanks to your lessons, I know now, better than heretofore, at what price souls are redeemed, and that if it is impossible to be at least a true mother without having the heart of a priest, it is still more impossible to be a true priest if one has not the heart of a mother. Hereafter it shall be the object of my ministry to give many Augustines to God. I will no longer kneel with desponding heart at the foot of the holy altar. I know now how to accomplish my work. Oh, mother, you have taught me; happy am I if I profit by such a lesson, and if, inflamed by your example, and after too much hesitation, I make the required sacrifices, and consecrate myself more entirely than ever to the sublime art of snatching souls from evil, and bringing them back to truth, to virtue, and to God.

APPENDIX.

AUTHENTICATED NOTES AND DOCUMENTS RELATIVE TO THE HISTORY OF ST. MONICA.

NOTE I.—SOUK-ARRAS (THE THAGASTE OF ANTIQUITY).

It is to-day a matter of well-authenticated fact that Souk-Arras occupies the ancient site of Thagaste. We here subjoin the principal documents bearing on this important fact, beginning with a letter from Captain Lewal, Commander-in-chief of the African Army, and addressed to the President of the Algerian Historical Society :

SOUK-ARRAS, *November 17, 1856.*

MR. PRESIDENT :—I have the honor of submitting to you an inscription which was unearthed a few days ago, and which will afford some light on the disputed fact that Souk-Arras occupies the site of ancient Thagasta, the birthplace of St. Augustine. I here add some details relating to this question. Without dwelling on the vast extent of the perimeter of the ruins and the multiplicity of tombs, which prove incontestably the past importance of this place ; without speaking of the geographical position assigned to Thagasta by ancient authors, and which seems to correspond so exactly with the locality which we now occupy, I limit myself to the examination of the inscriptions found up to this time. That which I submit to you is the third, and I send a brief description of the two preceding ones. The first is on a stone of small dimensions, and is as follows :

THA
GASI
CHAE
RE

It has been mentioned already, and the following interpretation given to it :

“Erected at the expense of Thagasta,” which appears to be problematic, and, if accepted, leaves the Ch still unexplained.* What can be verified is the word Thagasi, which bears a sufficient analogy, if not a resemblance, to Thagasta.

In the second place, another inscription has been published, whose first line runs thus :

MAEMILLIVS. THAGAS.....ANVS. ✓

The second word can be interpreted Thagasius, or Thagasitanus. From a grammatical point of view, the three forms, Thagasi, Thagasius, or Thagasitanus, are not satisfactory. However, the first two syllables, Thagas, which are all identical with those of Thagasta, induce the supposition that they are correctly solved despite the terminations.

I now come to the third inscription, but very recently unearthed, and which gives a more complete character of certitude to the inductions drawn from the two preceding ones. In form the stone is a rectangular parallelepiped ; its total height is 4 ft. 5½ in. ; length, 21⅓ inches ; thickness, 18⅛ inches. The stone is of a calcareous yellowish white, very fine in grain, compact and extremely hard, and such as is very common in the environs of Souk-Arras. Exposed to the air, it has assumed a gray tint. The height of the letters is a little more than 2⅛ inches ; the space between the lines, almost ⅓ of an inch. The inscription is surrounded by two shallow mouldings, in grooves, framed in a narrow listel, in the two upper angles of which, between the mouldings and it, two small hearts are discernible. In the two lower angles there were, doubtless, similar ones ; but, as the design shows, these angles no longer exist.

There are no other traces of ornaments or funereal emblems.

Here is the inscription :

* M. Renier has since explained this inscription thus : Thagasi, Χαίρε—Thagasta (hail).

MAMVLLIOM
 TIL PAP OPTATO
 CREMENTIANO
 FOR SINGVLA
 RIS FIDEI BONI
 TATIS MVNIFI
 CENTIÆ VI...
 ORDO SPLENDI
 DISSIMVS THA
 GASTENSIVIS
 CONLATA CER
 TATIM PECVNIA
 N CUIVS DEDICATIONE
 S^s... MILN ADOPVS MV
 NIFICENTIÆ SVÆ PATRI
 Æ DONVIT ETC....S
 PRÆTER FP.. VINE
 VD M.QVINCENO

The first six lines can be read without difficulty. In the 17th, after the 6th syllable, one or two letters are wanting, which a broken fragment renders utterly impossible any attempt at deciphering. From the 7th to the 13th line, all is very readable; and in the 9th and the 10th, the word Thagastensius is perfect. To this I shall presently refer. On the 13th line we find an N, which has no connection with *pecunia*, which precedes, nor with Cujus, that follows it, and may signify *Nos- tra*. The same line presents in the word dedication an I, with a transverse line at two-thirds of its height, which represents unquestionably T and I, since we see it reproduced at the 15th line in *Munificentia*, though the same word is written with the T and the I separated on the 7th line. At the 14th line we observe the head of an S, though the base is doubtful. This S is followed by another small s..., whose top is parallel with it; then comes a dash (—), and below it, is something like a C. So at the same line we discover four little letters quite distinct, the last two of which are surmounted by a dash (—); the rest of the line is very legible. At the 15th line, the last word is quite effaced. We, however, distinguish a T, which, flanked at the

right and left by two letters, and followed in the next line by the letter Æ, is probably nothing else than Patriæ; and this interpretation seems to harmonize with the apparent tenor of the whole inscription. The end of the 16th line is doubtful; the C of the last word is certain; the head of the S is almost certain. We can, therefore, suppose CONS to be an abbreviation of a frequently occurring word, Consecravit. The 17th line is the most difficult to decipher; but after close examination we seem to discover the word Præter. The P, the R, the E, and the T are probable; the rest doubtful. After an E, or rather an F, one resembling a P; then two or three letters impossible to read; the last four are certain. The last line appears to concern the date; the end is quite readable, but the beginning is very difficult. There appear to be a V and a D, then two or three letters I can not read, and perhaps then an M, a VI preceding an X, barred across, very legible.

Whatever interpretation be given to this inscription, it can not alter the fact that it contains the word Thagastensivis. Without doubt this word, like those cited from the first two stones, is derived, though, correctly from Thagasta; for we find, in the list of Bishops of the Councils, he of Thagasta qualified by the regular epithet of Thagastensis. However this may be, it is difficult to prove that Thagastensivis—so legible on the stone that now occupies our attention—is not a derivative of Thagasta. I remark, in the second place, that the Thagastensivis here does not apply to the personage whose ashes this stone marks; it belongs to the two preceding words: Ordo Splendidissimus Thagastensivis. This ample fact would refute the argument that might be urged that this inscription was tumulary, to wit: that they placed no inscription on the tombs of the inhabitants of cities, who died in their own homes, to show that they were born in that city.

Regarded in any way, this new discovery will strengthen the presumption drawn from the preceding inscriptions in favor of this spot being the site of Thagasta—a supposition that will, perhaps, turn into a certainty when the inscription I transmit you shall have been completed and interpreted by you.

I have the honor to be, yours, etc.,

CAPTAIN LEWAL,

Commander-in-Chief of the Army at Souk-Arras.

The *African Review*, in publishing this letter, accompanies it with the following observation: "The impression sent us by Captain Lewal was obtained by means of black lead, an excellent process when the stone is whole and in good preservation, which is not the case here.

"It would have been better to employ the process explained on page 78 of the first number of this *Review*, using a very strong paper."

"Below is what we can give as certain, in the text which has been sent to us:

MARCO AMVLIO MARCI
 FILIO PAPIRIA OPTATO
 CREMENTIANO
 EQVITI ROMANO SINGULA
 RIS FIDEI BONI
 TATIS MVNIFI
 CENTIAE VIRO
 ORDO SPLENDI
 DISSIMUS THA
 GASTENSIVM
 COLATA CER
 TATIM PECUNIA
 IN CIVIS DEDICATIONE

TO MARCUS AMULIUS
 SON OF MARCUS
 OF THE TRIBE OF PAPIRIA
 SURNAMED OPTATUS
 AND CREMENTIANUS
 A ROMAN KNIGHT
 A MAN EMINENT FOR HIS
 LOYALTY
 HIS BOUNTY AND HIS
 MUNIFICENCE,
 THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS
 MUNICIPAL BODY OF
 THE CITIZENS OF THAGASTA
 BY MEANS OF A SUBSCRIPTION
 READILY CONTRIBUTED TO

"The rest of this inscription appears to us to indicate that the day of the dedication of this municipal monument, Amulius ordered the distribution of bread and wine, and even money."

"The incontestable part of this inscription establishes: 1st. The identity of Souk-Arras and Thagasta being one and the same place, for the monument we have just been studying is essentially local in its character, and there was no modern city built at Souk-Arras, whose construction would have necessitated the bringing of materials from the surrounding ruins.

"2d. The true orthography of Thagasta and its ethnical Thagastensis,* which the learned Morcelli writes without *h*.

* "On coming to the 9th and the 10th lines, we read, without hesitation, Tha

"3d. The new stake, to determine the place and its surroundings, of the famous battle-field of Zama, for the position of Thagasta being well settled, enables us to locate Naraggara, which is situated twenty miles further on to the east. On the route to Carthage, adjacent to Naraggara, is the spot where the Romans and the Carthaginians met in mortal combat to decide which of the two nations should become mistress of the world. We expect a new impression, when we will resume this interesting question.

"A. BERBRUGGER."

We here give several unpublished facts concerning the ruins of Souk-Arras :

We take this passage from the "Journal of the March of the Expeditionary Column of Tebessa, under the Orders of General Randon" (June and July, 1846) :

Souk-Arras [Thagaste]. "Seventeen miles to the north of Mdaourouche, are the ruins of Souk-Arras, on the borders of a river of that name. These ruins cover about twenty-five acres on a small plateau on the right bank, and testify to the existence of a very important colony, which selected this spot because of the easy communication it afforded with the harbors of the Medjerda, the Seybouse, and the Mellaga.

"Water is abundant and excellent in quality, but fodder is scarce.

"On leaving Souk-Arras, an ancient Roman road, passing between wooded hills, leads to the Medjerda."

M. Berbrugger, who visited these ruins in 1850, thus describes them :

"The ruins of Thagaste, St. Augustine's birth-place, are situated on three eminences, stretching from northeast to southeast. The place is called Souk-Arras; a market is held there every Sunday. This locality is an hour's distance from the residence of Mohammed-Salah, the Kadi of Hanencha.

"The greater part of the ruins are situated on the eminence on which stands the Koubba of Sidi M'saoul, a holy Mussulman

gastensium. At the moment of going to press we received a letter from Capt. Lewal confirming our supposition. The late rains, he writes us, caused all uncertainty to disappear."

who died of the plague at the time when Bey Hamouda was reigning in Tunis, and Pacha Ali in Algiers.

"To the east of this eminence lie the ruins of an edifice the foundations of which are forty-four yards broad and ten deep. I read the following inscription on a flag-stone nearly six inches high, the letters being about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height :

.....VM VOTIS XXX ET.....

"To the left, east of the ruins, is a building, the plan of which denotes a facade twenty-seven yards broad and thirteen yards high. Like the preceding one, it is constructed of rough materials, intersected by tiers of hewn stone placed vertically one above the other.

"In ascending the stream of Souk-Arras, I met with some ruins of considerable magnitude, at a place called Ras-El-Ma (head source of the stream). A little farther on, below a fountain, is the *Henchir*, or ruins of Mrabta-Fatom (Marabout-Fatma), a good-sized heap of hewn stones.

"Among these ruins I met with the following inscription.*

"The following was found within the Zaouïa of Sidi-M'saoud :

....SA....
TIVS S. F.
DATVS
P. V. A. LXXI.
H. S. E.

THIS INDIVIDUAL,
SURNAMED DATVS,
LIVED
BEYOND THE AGE OF 71

"In the outer wall of the same, by the side of the entrance, is seen a stone hollowed in the form of a niche, in which niche some artist, if we may thus profane the word, has sculptured an upright figure of most grotesque aspect. The hands are resting on the hips in a fantastic attitude, and the arms are rounded so as to bear an exact resemblance to the handles of a basket. The dress consists of a tight-fitting tunic intersected by folds, which garment, girt round the waist, tightens as it

* M. Berbrugger visited these ruins in 1850, many years prior to the French occupation. The works carried on since then have brought fresh inscriptions to light.

approaches the lower parts so as to render all movement extremely difficult.

“Crosses are to be found on many of the stones; but they are the work of pious visitors of modern times. Mohammed-Salah, then Kadi of Hanencha, told me that he one day accompanied a French marabout, who was going to inter a bone of one of our greatest saints, in the very house where he was born thirty centuries ago! On hearing this I was amused to see how the simplest facts become distorted in passing an Arab’s lips.”

In his pamphlet, entitled *Excursion to the ruins of Khemissa*, M. le Commandant de la Mare has devoted some pages to Thagaste.

In conclusion, we borrow the following particulars from M. l’abbé Godard :

“SOUK-ARRAS.—I have collected the following inscriptions among the ruins of St. Augustine’s native town :

No. I.

SOLI INVICTO SACR...
 PRO SALVTE ET INCO
 LVMITATE PERPETVI
 IMP. CAES. L. DOMI
 TI AVRELIANI PII FELI
 AVG. P. M. TR. VI COS.
 III P P PROCONSVLI *

* “Monument dedicated to the victorious sun, to obtain health and prosperity for the perpetual Emperor Cæsar Lucius Domitius Aurelianus, the pious, fortunate, august, and great pontiff; Tribune for the sixth time, consul for the third, father of his country, and proconsul.”

M. l’abbé Godard mentions the last letter in line three, and the two last in line four, as doubtful.

The third consulate of Aurelian was A.D. 274; we know this from history, and this date does not coincide with the date in which he was elected tribune for the sixth time, as this would bring us down to the year 275, the date of the emperor’s death.—*Editor’s note.*

No. 2.

IOVI OPT. MAX. STATORI ET IVN. AVG. REG.
 M. GARGILIUS SYRVS VEL. F. P. P. ET IVL. VICTORIA EIVS
 LIBERALITATE ET PECVNIA SVA
 POSVERVNT *

"The following inscription is perfectly legible; but I do not understand the CH.—In the *Annuaire Archéologique* of Constantine, it is stated that an inscription had been found containing the word *Thagasius*. Nothing is known about it at Souk-Arras.

No. 3.†

T H A
 G A S I
 C H A E
 R E

No. 4.

D. M. S.		D. M. S.
O. PRAE		CAECILI
CILIVS		A LIBO
GENIAIS		SA P.V.A.
P. V. A. LXXXI		LXXV
H. S. E.		H. S. E.

PRAECILIV. BATV
 RVS PARENTIB †

* "To Jupiter, the good and great, who arrests fugitives, and to Juno, the august queen.—Marcus Gargilius Syrus, son of Velius (?), president of the provinces, and Julia Victoria, by his liberality and at his own expense, has erected this monument."

At the first line, before the word *Junoni*, we read Et instead of the E given by M. Pabbé Godard, who failed to remark the prolongation to the left of the upper horizontal line of the E, and which denotes the letter T. In line two, we read VEL. F. after *Syrus*.

We think *præses provinciae* the correct rendering of the abbreviation P. P.—*Editor's note.*

† Vide Captain Lewal's letter.

‡ "Praecilius Baturus to his parents who lie buried here: Quintus (?)"

No. 5.

D. M. S.
 CLAVDIA RVF
 NA SACERDOS
 MAGNA PIA VXI
 ANNIS CHI
 H. S. E.

No. 6.

D. M. S.
 B. PRIVATVS
 V. A. LXXXX
 B. IANVARIA
 PATRI MER.
 S.S. FECIT
 H. S. E.

No. 7.

SEDINI
 MVS LIE
 BIA VIXI. A
 NNIL LVII
 H. S. EST.

“The epitaph of this Sedinimus Liebia, who lived to the age of fifty-seven, was placed above a crescent; it is defaced and very coarsely sculptured.

No. 8.

“Above the representation of a roughly sculptured female figure, in a niche, we read:

D. M. S.
 APRONIA
 LAETA PIA
 V. AN. LX
 H. S. E.

Praecilius Genias, who lived more than eighty-one years; and Caecilia Libosa, who lived more than seventy-five years.”

This name Praecilius has become celebrated since the discovery of the beautiful tomb of Cirta's steward, found at the base of the rock of Constantine.

Above each of these epitaphs is a crescent, supported by a palm on the right-hand inscription, and by a kind of flower on the left-hand one.—*Editor's note.*

No. 9.

“Above a crescent is the following :

D. M. S.
PAEVI
VS OCTAVIVS
SDATVS ·P. VI.
ANNIS XVII

“In a wall, near the stream in the ravine, is a fragment of a frieze (?) with this mutilated inscription :

No. 10.
.....MAMVL.....*

“In the same spot is another inscription almost wholly effaced.

No. 11.

C. FLAVIO C. FIL
PAPIRIA HILARO
FELICI EQ. ROM. CVI
CVM SPLENDIDISSI
MVS ORD.....
PIIS VII.....
MOS V.....
PATRI.....
ET HON.....
PRIVM.....
QVIIM.....
...SDOC.....
...IVE.....
STATUM LOCO DM
IVXTA PARENTUM
CREVISSET EXEMPLVM
REMISA PECUNIA QVN
MEREBA TVR PONI CVRAVI.....”†

* Doubtless the Marcus Amulius mentioned by Captain Lewal.—*Editor's note.*

† This dedication is made by the municipal (ordo) body of Thagaste, Caius.

It is a pleasing sight to see French soldiers, young officers, and even generals, at the time when by their swords they are restoring Africa to France, employing their leisure hours in taking rubbings of ancient inscriptions, deciphering their meaning, and illuming their passage with rays of light as well as rays of glory.

NOTE II.—TRADITIONS RELATIVE TO ST. MONICA.

St. Augustine has bequeathed us but few details of his mother's youth and early years. Happily, tradition has supplied this void, in acquainting us with a certain number of most interesting facts which reveal St. Monica's character most distinctly. These facts, never varying, are to be met with in very ancient records, and particularly in the divers liturgies of the Orders observing the Augustinian Rule. The Canons Regular, no matter what Congregation they belong to, the Hermits of St. Augustine, the Servites, the Premonstratensians, and the Preaching Friars, cherish and celebrate the memory of these facts with such unanimity that it is impossible to doubt their authenticity. First amongst them are the ancient lessons and antiphons of St. Monica, found in all the liturgies of the Orders following the Augustinian rule. The tones of joy and sorrow are admirably intermingled throughout the whole of the office. The antiphons devoted to St. Monica and her son are most beautiful.

The middle ages dedicated many sequences to St. Monica. The one throwing most light upon her life, commences: "Augustini magni patris." It is attributed to Adam de Saint Victor.

All the liturgies of the Orders following the Augustinian Rule, the Canons Regular, Servites, Hermits of St. Augustine, Preaching Friars, etc., agree not only as regards the traditions to which we have alluded, but also as regards a very ancient document, in the form of a letter addressed to a Spouse of Christ, *dilecta sponsa Christi*, relating the life of St. Monica, to whom the anonymous author gives the name of mother, *caram matrem*. Misled by this word, those who discovered this composition imagined that it was written by St. Augustine, and

that this spouse of Christ was probably his sister (for we know that she entered religion); hence they concluded that Augustine wrote this letter in order to acquaint her with her mother's death. They therefore entitled it: *Ad sororem*; or, *Sorori suæ Perpetuæ Virgini*. And as some not much versed in the art of criticism took the same view of the case, the letter was attributed to St. Augustine.

But this opinion is untenable. The style is wholly unworthy of the great doctor. He relates things which were too well known to his sister for him to dream of recounting them to her. Many of the expressions are borrowed from the *Confessions*, and there are many inaccuracies not to be found in St. Augustine's writings. Moreover, there is no proof that this letter was addressed to St. Augustine's sister. It may have been addressed to an inmate of one of the convents following the Augustinian Rule, for such existed even during the lifetime of the saint. And there is no reason why, after St. Augustine's death, and in order to complete his *Confessions*, and reveal those marvels which the great doctor's humility had kept concealed, one of his immediate disciples, or a disciple of those who had personally known Augustine, should not have written this letter, relating all that was known of St. Monica, and addressing it to one of the virgins following her son's rule.

And although we might wish the letter written in a more modern style, and by an author of the seventh or eighth century, who, in order to publish all the traditions relative to St. Monica, resolved to embody them in a letter such as Augustine might have written to his sister, it is none the less true that the subject matter of this letter is excellent and valuable. It is borrowed from records undoubtedly ancient, all the Augustinian liturgies corroborate its authenticity, and many portions of it are supported by the early Roman and Gallican liturgies; therefore it is of great value, in spite of the few inaccuracies by which it is disfigured.

The authentic account of the translation of the relics of St. Monica is carefully preserved in the convent of St. Augustine at Rome.

The discourse of Pope Martin V., in honor of St. Monica,

which is, as it were, the Bull of her canonization, is extremely rare. The Bollandists give only an extract from it.

NOTE III.—DISCOURSE OF MARTIN V. IN HONOR OF SAINT MONICA.

SERMO MARTINI QUINTI ROMANI PONTIFICIS IN HONORE SANCTÆ MONICÆ.

I. Gaudeo mihi quoque, Fratres religiosissimi, laetitiam hanc communem esse, quae hodie vestrum universum Ordinem conjungit, quod ejusdem Parentis estis Matrem adepti, cujus et vos secundum spiritum filii esse debetis. Etsi enim cura quam gerimus majorem quendam titulum nobis adferat, una tamen ac par omnium fidelium caritas corda continet: ubi non extrinseci tituli, non alienae nuncupationes, non temporanea vocabula valde prosunt, sed ejusdem spiritus communicatio, quae nos ejusdem Regni secundum Jesum Christum Salvatorem nostrum haeredes et cohaeredes facit. In hac igitur spe atque expectatione, in qua simul omnes laboramus tanquam unius Dominici agri cultores, communis nobis fiducia est. Hic igitur, unde fratres sumus, praesens me delectat Dominici muneris gratia; ac libenter vos mihi consortes in tanto gaudio adsumo, pariter ut omnes eandem laetitiam frequentioribus studiis celebremus. Sic enim decet ut superna jocunditate in unum laetemur, quos necesse est fide, pace, oratione esse conjunctos. Sive igitur ut Ecclesiae filii ad laetitiam convenistis, sive unanimes spirituali caritate fratres, ego illinc parens, hinc vobiscum frater in hac exsultatione congratulor. Nec sane mirum si et ipse vobiscum in Domino frater dici velim, qui me secundum nostri Magistri vocationem et gratiam *Servus omnium* appello. Nullum denique nomen est quod respuam, modo simul omnes caritas una contineat. Quando ipse idem Salvator omnium se et matrem et fratrem et sororem dixit quisquis ejusdem Patris, qui in Coelis est, voluntatem servat. Ceterum ad vos singularis quaedam cura esse debet, qui non tantum fidem, verum etiam religionem, ac vitae Christianae formam, omnibus post-

positis; sancte accumulamini; ut non solum communi appellatione; sed etiam singulari gratia ac studio Fraternitatem colatis. Itaque et vobis illud primum convenit quod ad Ephesios: *Quia jam non estis hospites, et advenae, sed estis cives sanctorum, et domestici Dei.* Nemo enim vos ad hanc frequentiam convenisse videat, quin in vobis fateatur esse Deum, quos idem Spiritus in unam hanc sollicitudinem conduxerit. Mihi vero illud et placet, et licet dicere, quod Princeps Apostolorum, cujus locum tenemus, Fratribus suis dixit: *Vos estis genus electum, regaleque Sacerdotium.* Sic enim intueor, plerosque ex vobis Clericali ac Sacerdotali honore insignitos: quorum tamen una cura et voluntas est simul Deo pro tanti muneris benignitate gratias referre. Neque ego aliud magis optem, quam sin ul in tanto gaudio laetari, simul in tanta gratia tantaque festivitate eandem animi devotionem profiteri.

II. Undique enim et ipse mihi faciendum intelligo, praesertim quod Romam, hoc est, et Sedem et Patriam nostram video tanta gratulatione exsultare, tanquam omnes eandem omnium Parentem nunc primum amplectamur. Quis vero non totis studiis conetur, ut in hanc solemnitatem fidem suam conferat, quam cernit amplitudine gratiae omnibus communem esse? Nam de illius Matre celebritatem agimus, cujus virtus, cujus gratia et victoria fidem omnium illustrat. Quis enim nescit, aut quis dissimulare potest, unum esse Beatissimi Augustini nomen in Ecclesia, atque in omni Christianae Fidei loco celeberrimum? Nemo autem negaverit Matri gloriam, quam dignissime impenderit Filio; nemo a Genitrice separet laudes, quas Genito existimet esse tribuendas; praesertim cum omnes noverimus non carnis magis fuisse Beatissimam Monicam parentem, quam cordis et spiritus. De quo apud Deum illa semper intercessit, nihil aliud sollicita, quam ut unius filii Augustini salutem pareret. Sic enim et ille scribit aliquando sibi Matrem dixisse, nullam rem jam sibi esse ultra hujus vitae voluptati, cum Filium jam cerneret aeternae vitae desiderio felicitatis terrenae contemptorem.

III. Non itaque jure ac merito gaudeam, qui sim tantae gratiae administrator, ut Beatissimae hujus Monicae Reliquias contingam, reddamque beatum Corpus eisdem, quos tanquam Nepotes Filius genuerit Matri? Quanta vero, aut quanta dig-

nitatis illa Mater est, quae tanto Filio in oculis omnium mortaliū splendet! Felix sane venter, beata profecto ubera, veneranda brachia, denique totum corpus honorandum, cujus cura et ministerio tantus Filius orbi terrarum clarus est. Sic ferme solet et patrum dignitas conferri filiis, et filiorum gloria prodesse parentibus, quorum maxime unum fuit vitae studium, ac successiva caritatis diligentia, ne tam corpore et aetate, quam gratia et spiritu videatur filius parentem imitari. Accipite igitur, Religiosi, bonis affectibus, attrectate piis manibus. Tollite sanctis humeris Matrem, cujus filios vos esse gaudetis. Copulate honorem, jam in duobus unam laudem ac Religionem componite: jam in Matre ac Filio eandem gratiam celebrate. Mihi vero ipsi haud minor gratulatio est, cui datum sit tantae festivitatis esse participem. Vos, quoque Romani Cives, agite laetitiam: vos, quibus tantum munus venit, accumulate gaudia. Multo enim laetior beatiorque hic dies vobis est, quam cum Matrem Deum, ut ipsi vocabant, ex Phrygia adductam in hanc Urbem acceperunt, cujus muneris qui fuit minister Scipio Nasica fertur maximam gloriam peperisse: tanquam solus in ea aetate justus Romae esset, quem deceret tantae religionis obsequium peragere. Major, inquam, justiorque nobis est laetitiae causa, qui non fictis sacris, non falsa religione, sed sancta ac vera pietate ducimur. Nec turpes Matris Deum reliquias colimus, sed magni ac summi Dei cultricem religioso studio veneramur. Nec praeterea Scipionem vanum impuri cultus sacerdotem sequimini, sed Martinum Ecclesiae ac Fidei nostrae Pontificem, nec minus vestrae caritatis conservum habetis. Haec omnium una cura est: haec, ut cerno, totius populi pia ac sedula institutio, Beatae Monicae reiteratas exsequias colere.

IV. Omnes dudum noverant Filii nomen: quicumque de Christo, de Fide, de Religione aliquid saperent, omnibus in ore erat Augustinus: ut nihil pene ex Sacris Litteris possit nisi eo duce intelligi, nihil nisi eo interprete explicari. Eo jam auctore factum, ut nec sapientiam philosophis invidemus, nec oratorum eloquentiam desideremus, non studiosorum ingenia requiramus: non denique acumen Aristotelis nobis necessarium sit, non Platonis Eloquentia, non Prudentia Varronis, non gravitas Socratis, non auctoritas Pythagorae, non Empedoclis solertia, non cujusquam illius generis hominum scientia ac virtus exemplo aut

documento nobis esse debeat. Idem nobis Prophetarum oracula, idem Apostolorum voces refert, idem omnem omnium Scripturarum sensum exprimit. Unus postremo omnium Patrum, sapientiumque ingenia ac studia exhibet. Si veritatem quaeris, si doctrinam, si pietatem, quis doctior, quis justior, quis, ut ita dicam, sanctior Augustino?

V. Hunc vero tantum ac talem Virum pia Mater Monica genuit. Tanti Patris gloriam haec Beatissima ministravit: tanta igitur hujus Mulieris dignitas, tam digna et memoranda illius memoria, quantus ille in tot libris splendet, quantus omnium gentium ore ac fama praedicatur. Siquidem, ut ante dixi, haec illi fuit tot meritorum, tantae gloriae; haec secundum Deum tantae felicitatis origo, ut jam parum sit, quod hominem genuerit, quod aluerit, quod instituerit, quod communi more mulierum puero fomenta praestiterit. Unigenitus hic fuit Matri, ut intelligas, non ad unius propagationem, verum ad totius orbis utilitatem eas nuptias quaesitas esse: quippe uno contenta, satis habuit unius vitam omnium gentium beneficio peperisse. Itaque illud est tanti partus emolumentum maximum, quod quem in carne genuit, non protulit carni, quem materno utero, maternis officiis servavit, semper in id visa est intenta, quonam modo omnium mortalium generi filium efficeret.

VI. At quem non delectet hoc apud Augustinum cognoscere, solitam Matrem illi ex ipsis cunabulis Jesu Christi Nomen, quo magis postea per aetatem dulcesceret, infantilibus labiis imprimere? Sic deinde per omnes aetatis gradus gessit, nihil negligens, nihil intermittens, quod ad hominis salutem spectaret. Quis, eodem ipso Augustino referente, omnes clamores explicet, quibus illa dies noctesque pro unius Filii, non incolumitate corporis, sed sanitate, hoc est felicitate mentis, et integritate animae coelum ac sydera pulsabat? Cum tantae preces viderentur ad multorum salutem dirigendae, quantas illa pro unius Filii caritate proferebat! Quis lacrymas enumeret, quis fletus cogitet, quos illa Mater pro Pueri pietate edidit? Nec cessavit, donec coelitus admonita est, non posse tantarum lacrymarum Filium perire; ac postremo eo fidei ac salutis loco futurum Augustinum, quem illa tenuisset. Itaque deinceps, quanquam ipse multa praetereo, similes curas intendit, quo coelesti oraculo obscqueretur, semper Augustinum, semper Filium, semper Dec

ac Religioni promissum ac devotum meditans, ut ne pedem ab hominis vestigio declinaret.

VII. Neque interim refero, quibus artibus apud Virum, quibus apud Deum meritis ejusdem Viri salutem obtinuerit, ut hoc fieret, quod Apostolus refert prima ad Corinthios : *Salvatus est vir infidelis propter mulierem fidelem* : ne ex omni familiae numero quisquam in eo loco deesset, ubi salvi atque electi aeternis conscriptis recensentur. Illud vero quantae admirationis, quantae fidei, quantae probitatis exemplum est, quod Augustinum per tanta maris ac terrarum spatia sequuta sit : neque una cum eodem Filio perigrinationem adgressa : nam ire cupiens Augustinus, ipse fatetur Matrem elusisse. Verum posteaquam ille hinc Mediolanum est profectus, illa quoque non muliebribus consiliis eadem cepit vestigia, sublatis ex Africa velis ad Filium ubicumque esset plusquam femineis studiis perrectura. Oh vere Phoenissam Mulierem, cui recte illud convenit a Salvatore dici, *Mulier, magna est fides tua!* Nempe quanta fides, qua, illam tam audaci proposito per undas tempestatesque, per tot viarum discrimina intrepidam, atque indubitatum ferret, quousque Mediolani Filium, nihil tale de Matre expectantem complexa est ! Ibi vero quis referat quantas curas, non quasi pro filio mater, sed pro Augustino ut sanctus esset, fortissima ac sanctissima Mulier adierit ? Tum quibus meritis, qua virtutum fama Ambrosii Simplicianique totque maximorum Virorum ac sanctissimorum Patrum charissimam familiaritatem adtigerit ? Nihil apud singulos inquirens aliud, quam ut Filii salutem fidelissimis hominibus commendaret. Possem hoc loco multa memorare, quae illa ut Augustinus ad fidem converteretur omnino super feminam gessit ; verum nolo me existimetis hodie hunc sermonem coepisse, qui vos Beatae Monicae merita ac laudes doceam. Tantum vero his officiis valuit, ut quod unum plusquam Filium cupiebat, eundem videret Baptismo ac fidelibus Sacramentis renasci, quasi unius mulieris gemitibus evicta coelestis Curia, non posset diutius hujus Feminae suspiriis unigeniti vitam ac salutem negare : ubi praecipue tot Patres in Coelum votis ac precibus intenderent, *Dimitte illam, quia clamat post nos*. Hinc demum, ut cetera quae plura his sunt praeteream, nunquam apud Filium coelestibus verbis cessavit usquequaque per Italiam vadentis iter comitata.

VIII. Nec sane ipse magnae aut parvae rei quidquam incon-sulta Matre agebat. Exstant familiares ejus dialogi, ac plerae-que disputationes cum amicis ac discipulis habitae, in quibus de maximis rebus disputatur. Atque inter cetera quoque hu-jusmodi sermones referuntur, non quidem ut solent mulier-culae studio garrulitatis alienis colloquiis permisceri : verum ut singulari quodam judicio praedita crebro haec testis infertur. Sunt omnino illius de Deo, de Paradiso, de nostra Redemp-tione in nonnullis Augustini voluminibus gravissimae senten-tiae, et quae maximis quoque ingeniis satis sint ; nempe divini-tus edocta, quae disserebat, ea superno testimonio confirmata tuebatur. Habebat credo in illius Mulieris corde alius spir-itus, quam qui solet per humanam linguam fari. Quamobrem fere inducitur ab Augustino in ejusmodi colloquiis veluti quae-dam omnium rerum Magistra, et cui aeternus Deus rerum sua-rum cognitionem et auctoritatem dederit, ut ferme liceret ei dicere : *An experimentum quaeritis ejus, qui in me loquitur Christus ?* Ita arbitror factam illam omnibus, qui in Italia praestantes habebantur, ipsa sapientiae gravitate notissimam, dum Filium, verior dux quam comes, ex Medionalo Romam consequitur. Quo medio tempore Augustinum ferunt, sancto-rum hominum consilia quaesivisse, quorum praecipue in Tuscia multi fuisse Conventus dicuntur : hodieque adparent apud pos-teros illorum colloquiorum vestigia. In his vos adhuc frequen-tibus consortiis habitatis. At nos cum ex Florentia Romam venimus, quaedam vidimus in agro Senensi, nec sine magna hujus recordationis voluptate per Fratres illos transivimus, tan-quam adhuc vetustissimarum cellularum ac speluncarum ves-tigia spectaremus.

IX. Sed ad Beatissimam Monicam redeo. Sequuta illa per omnes terras Filium Romam usque, spectatis omnibus, quae in hac Urbe visenda erant, una cum Filio ad Ostia Tyberina proficiscitur, unde ex Italia in Carthaginem navigatio esset. Verum quid hoc loco dicam, Fratres optimi ? Quaenam potuit esse caussa cur noluerit eam Deus Italia excedere ? Nam in loco ultimum diem peregit, eousque Filium sequuta : dum illi fere (ut ita dicam) patriae muros ostenderet his pene verbis : “ Tu “quidem hinc abeas, Fili, teque ad optatam patriam refer ; “verum ita, ut memineris unam esse in Coelo immortalem ac

“veram, quae est communis omnium Sanctorum Patria. Nihil
“aliud igitur a me tibi relictum putes, quam ut hanc et votis
“et studiis omnibus proseguare. Tum ego te in sinum meum
“recipiam. Nam ut te longius in his terris sequar, modo Deus
“prohibet. Hic meae peregrinationis finis: hic meae mortali-
“tatis limes esto. Vade nostro auxilio nostraque tutela secu-
“rus. Felix tempus erit, cum simul ambos Filii tui, Filiique
“mei, te in Italiam revocato, religiosa pietate servabunt.” Haec
pene mihi videor illam prophetantem audisse, atque hoc illud
tempus esse, quod tanto ante illa praedixit. Quis vero non hic
videat Omnipotentis Dei pietatem, misericordiam, providen-
tiam, qui noluerit tam insigni dono Italian, quin potius terra-
rum orbem fraudari? Non enim facile credo, si in Africa diem
obiisset, fuisset aliquis, qui beatos cineres collegisset, nec po-
tuisset superesse tot Africae vastationibus tantarum Reliquia-
rum memoria. Non enim servassent Matrem, qui Filium jan
toto orbe notum, si non ante translatus esset, perdidissent.
Quanquam ne in oppido quidem Ostiensi tuta fuissent Sancto-
rum Ossa, nisi Dominico praesidio essent custodita. Latuit
igitur hoc modo per multas aetates Beatum Corpus, Deo ita
providente, uti per vos aliquando illustraretur Mater, qui Filii
nomen tanta pietate celebratis. Ego vero et mihi ipsi gratulor,
hoc esse temporibus nostris concessum, ut simus apud vos tam
praeclari muneris auctores. Ac sane puto non aliam ob caus-
sam servata esse Ostiae ruinarum vestigia, quam ut his Reli-
quiis locus esset, qui aliquando referret quasi pignus per tot
annos reservatum. Est enim a temporibus Honorii, quando
illa ad Coelos migravit, ad hanc nostram aetatem, annus supra
quam millesimus, quo Deus nobis suae misericordiae benigni-
tatem aperuit. Nam illud quoque multiplicis existit gratiae,
quod dum unum corpus requirimus, multa sunt uno pietatis
opere relecta. Quae quonam modo se habuerint, jam velim
me referente discant qui forte ea nondum plane audierunt. Sic
enim spero paullo post hujus gratiae opus universo terrarum
orbe promulgandum, cum hic dies sit, quo, ut cernitis, Romam
ex omni quae sub Coelo est natione concurritur. Atque, ut
opinor, id consulto egit Deus, ut solito etiam frequentiores pere-
grini, et advenae essent; quorum oculis placuit tantae supernae
largitatis beneficium ostendere.

X. Jam igitur explicemus, quo ordine, quibusque modis tum quorum ministerio Beatissimae Monicae, Sanctissimi Patris ac Doctoris Augustini Matris Corpus sit nobis concedentibus repertum. Frater Petrus, homo vestri Ordinis, ac nostrorum Sacrorum Custos, quem etiam fecimus Electensem Episcopum, is saepe dudum a nobis petiverat, ut hoc praestaremus, quod illi eret Beatae Monicae Reliquias Romam transferre, aut in alium quempiam locum, ubi congrua ac solemniter veneratione colerentur; quippe male haberi, ac servari Ostiae, qui locus pene desertus esset. Maxime autem orabat, ut eas vestro Ordini tribueremus: sic enim decere conjungi Filio Matrem, et eosdem esse utriusque servatores, qui essent et cultores. Id nos hactenus certis ex causis distulimus, non quasi non iudicarem dandum quod postulabat: sed nonnulla erant impedimenta, quae prius oporteret expediri. Postremo tamen, et precibus et auctoritate multorum victi, annuentibus nostris Fratribus, concessimus iter, quoque modo videretur, ad Urbem eas Reliquias transferret. Vocat ille ad se alium Fratrem Augustinum hunc ipsum praesentem: atque illi operam dat negotii ducendi. Ille vero ut libenter suscepit, ita sine mora omnia quae viderentur opportuna negotio. Idem ceteros sollicitat, parat, ut in rem parati adsint; nam sibi in animo esse, ut in die Palmarum, qui proximus est praeteritus, transveherentur. Primum omnium quod erat necessarium Ostiensem hominem convenit, cui soli notus dicebatur locus, ubi erat sepulcrum. Respondet ille, se quidem locum nosse, (nam sub Altari in Ecclesia Sanctae Aerae sic se ab uno Seniorum excepisse, ac semper consulto factum, ut Sepulcrum paucis, ac ferme uni notum esset,) ceterum vereri, ne simul et aliorum Sanctorum Ossa in eodem mausoleo clauderentur. Id renunciatum est nobis. Ac nos respondimus: Si hoc ita esset, nec discerni possent, Ossa omnia, quae in eodem monumento invenirentur, simul haberetis. Cum his mandatis laetior dimissus Frater Augustinus, Rodolphum Castellanum cum aliis, qui multi numero Romae tunc erant Fratribus, convocat. Ita omnes Ostia ad designatum locum proficiscuntur. Fuit Ostia quondam Romana Colonia, ab Anco Martio quarto Romanorum Rege condita, duodeviginti miliaribus hinc ad mare distans: oppidum olim dives, nunc vix pauca supersunt vestigia. Eo ubi pervenerunt,

tendunt cum mandatis nostris ad locum, qui ostendebatur in inferiori aditu Ecclesiae, ubi primum ad dexteram Altaris plus octo pedes effodiunt, ubi invenerunt parvula ossa; super planum lapidem posita erant. Videbantur tamen esse Reliquiae Sanctorum, etsi res nullo litterarum indicio adparebat. Tum vero omnes ambigunt, quid facto opus sit. Non enim existimabant esse Reliquias, quas quaerebant. Fornix item erat tam densus ac solidus, ut nec fortibus malleis pulsatus sonitum redderet. Undique igitur tentant, si quis forte sit aditus. Nihil omnino cernitur. Denique ex eo loco saxum movent, ubi priores Reliquiae inventae erant, nam prae veneratione timuerunt contingere. Tum vero ostiolum adparuit, unde in secretiorem tumulum ibatur. Monumentum in modum camerae amplum subter erat, usquequaque inter Altare, et parietem replens. Ibi plures arcae in ordine stabant, quarum aliae aliis majores erant. Ad dexteram tria erant Sanctorum corpora; Primum Lini Martyris, qui post Beatum Petrum primus fertur Cathedram tenuisse: Hinc aliud Felicis Pontificis, qui et ipse, Claudio Principe Martyrii coronam adeptus est: Tum et Asterii Martyris aliud sepulcrum sequebatur. In sinistra erat Beatae Constantiae primum sepulcrum, ubi cum Filia jacuerat (nam simul ambae Martyrium susceperant): Dehinc arcula B. Aureae Virginis et Martyris Ossa continebat. Huic subjectum erat Beatae Monicæ sepulcrum, cujus magnitudo hominis staturam implebat. Verum illud omnino intelligendum, ac propterea Deo gratiae referendae, qui tam mirabilis in suis Sanctis triumphat, nec patitur ullo tempore misericordiae suae expertes esse, qui se sponte pro amore ipsius Martyriis obtulerunt. Namque ex ossibus Virginum, ut manifestum erat, perennis liquor exsudabat, qui facile omnium odoramentorum suavitatem vinceret. Quae igitur Regum ac Tyrannorum jactantia, quod in auro ac marmore sepeliantur, quod imbuantur balsamo, quod magnificis tumulis conditi a populis honorentur? Quid? Quod fuit Fratri Augustino evenit contactu Beatorum Ossium? Nunquam potuit manus sacro odore purgare, donec lavit aqua benedicta; quasi ita Sacramento cederet Sacramentum; quod nequivisset communi lavacro aboleri. Mihi vero magis quoddam indicium praesentis Divinitatis videtur, nulla humana cura Defunctorum Reliquias divinis odoribus distillare. Quippe ut adpareat, quem-

admodum in vita carnis concupiscentiam nescierunt, ita eos post vera immortalitate insigniri. Neque hoc dubium fuit: siquidem nos hujus rei experimentum nostris oculis conspeximus. Quiescite jam, beata Corpora: manete, o Sanctissimae Reliquiae, quibus sanguis ille ob Domini nostri amorem fusus, in coelestis roris suavitatem convertitur.

XI. Aperto igitur Beatae Monicae Sepulcro, Fratres quanta possunt veneratione spectatum atque honoratum Corpus colligunt, simul altissimis vocibus divinarum laudum hymnos decantantes. Hoc modo illi desiderio potiti, ad Urbem multis sequentibus properant: quibus interim nostro jussu obviam procedit ex eodem Ordine Lucas, nunc episcopus in Corsica: tum hic Frater Antonius Legatus ab Rege Aragonum ad nos missus. Illud vero pulcherrimum, ac sane mirum dictu: adventantibus circa Sanctum Paulum Reliquiis, tantus ex inaudito per totam Urbem tumultus est erectus, quantus nullo praeconio potuisset excitari. Dominica erat Palmarum, qui dies est Romae convenarum frequentissimus. Millia peregrinorum undique discurrebant: quidnam hoc esset cogitantibus respondebatur: Beatae Monicae Reliquias tum primum in Urbem inferri. Illi qui nesciebant Beatae Monicae nomen mirabantur. Ceterum ut audiebant Beatissimi Augustini Matrem fuisse, omnes sine mora e domibus atque hospitiiis effundebantur: plerique concursantium vici, dum alius alium hortatur, impellit, arripit, incredibilis fiebat euntium tumultus. Ibi homo plebeius, qui apud Sanctum Paulum restiterat, viso gentium concursu, ut forte potuit flexis genibus, Sanctam maximis precibus venerabatur, opem marcido corpori exostulans. Nocte insequenti maculis, quibus in modum leprae universum corpus tegebatur, mundatus est. Deinde in Urbem ingrediuntur: nec capaces erant tumultuantium viae; omnes videre, inspicere et tangere cupiebant. Plurimi, quibus non dabatur adcessus, aut capiteis aut zonis, aut hujusmodi rebus jactis, modo aliqua re contigissent, devotionem explebant. At per viam homo Romanus, cujus oculi pene caligaverant, post orationem factam, claro lumini est redditus. Ita personantibus Fratrum ac Sacerdotum hymnis canticisque Matris Corpus ad Filii ecclesiam transfertur. Non deerant vulgi clamores, non totius populi voces, non devotorum, non mulierum orationes ac lacrymae. Omnes gaudiis

omnes laudibus ac votis satagebant. Neque illo tantum die solemnitas acta est. Omnem illam Hebdomadam, quae est, uti nostis, sanctissima, pari devotione celebrarunt. Puerulus erat in domo Fratrum, Frater altero oculo derelictus. Hunc mulier cognata avitum applicavit, ut ante Corpus aliquid pueriliter orans flecteretur: atque illa cum paucis mulieribus pueri valetudinem precata, paulo post surgens, sanum atque integrum utroque lumine recepit. Eodem modo est de pluribus vulgatum, qui praecipue gloriantur similibus beneficiis, secum illam meruisse. Nec mirum quidem, si haec Beati Corporis praesentia effecit, quando et ipsum Monumentum, quod paulo post vacuum ex Ostia translatum est, hujusmodi miracula potuit operare; nam ita visum est Beata Ossa id fere desiderare, ut in veteri arcula, tanquam in suo habitaculo servarentur. Effossam igitur gravi devotione per amnem deportarunt; ac dum in Ecclesia paululum resideret, Fratribus ad Reliquias profectis, mulier cujus filius erat octavum jam mensem gravi atque implicito morbo aegrotus, arreptum parvulum sincerissima spe, in Arcam imponit: mosque sanum factum, super pedes nitentem jam infantulum statuit. Ista nunc quotidiana sunt, atque in oculis omnium gesta; ut nihil non sperare liceat patrocínio illius adfuturum, quod aut corporibus, aut mentibus nostris necessarium fuerit.

XII. Quam igitur gaudendum tibi, o Roma, quae hanc Parentem suscepisti? Ego vero quam maxime exultem, vix possum referre, quod nostra aetate tam benigne Deus nostris rebus adcesserit. Mihi ipsi haud dubium Patronum Augustinum in Coelis habiturus videor: siquidem necesse est, et Filium eisdem muneribus debere, quibus Mater adfecta est. Speciosissimum vero hoc tempore munus, quandoquidem Ecclesia, quantum ad nostra pertinet gubernacula, opulenta pace fruitur. Itaque et hoc in rebus nostris praeclarissimum ducemus Sanctis quoque optatam sedem praestitisse; nec tantum ut uni locum dederimus, cum et Augustino et Monicae pariter hoc gratum fuisse existimem. Quid vero ipse charius habere possem, quam inter ceteros Sanctos uni Beatissimo Augustino gratificari? cujus tanta exstant erga omnem Catholicam Ecclesiam beneficia, ut nulli pene, ut ita dicam, Sanctorum majora merita debeamus. Quidquid enim simul omnes Apostoli plantaverunt, quidquid

Apollo, atque alii Apostolorum sectatores rigaverunt, hic coronavit, hic tetendit, hic, velut circumposito aggere, materiam praebeuit, qua ex Deo feliciora crementa susciperet. Totus itaque jam Augustini fio, meque illi quibus possum desideriiis voveo, cujus opem capiti mihi in primis necessariam arbitror. At vobis quantum gloriari licet, Fratres devotissimi, qui sub tanto Magistro militiam geritis, qui sub tanto nomine Religionem servatis, qui ad speciem tanti praeclari exempli vitam exponitis! Tam deinceps honorate in Filio Matrem, duobus aequa religione servite. Ac si fortasse mulieribus hujus Religionis forma placuerit, una erit Beatissima Monica, cujus exemplum imitentur. Una erit Matrona sanctissima, cujus virtutem sequantur; una erit coelestis Vidua, cujus felicitatem amplectantur.

XIII. Ceterum hinc vos existimate hodie a nobis admonitos minime licere, ut a data Regula declinetis, quibus tam magna exempla proposita sunt, quibus tot commoditates adcessere. Quanquam nec aliis locis pepercit Deus bonitati suae erga nos, quasi omnino concupiverit munus suum implere, ac praedicatoris sui Augustini omnem gloriam patefacere, vestrum Ordinem extremis beneficiis sublimare. Sic enim audivimus Tiaram Augustini, Litumque illum Pastoralem non ante multos dies reperta, magnoque pretio redempta, in Sardinianam Valentiam translata esse. Ita omnibus locis et rebus bene successit, definiente Deo, ut qui rite praeter ceteros Augustinum colitis, soli omnem illius suppellectilem possideatis. Quid enim magis congruit, quam eosdem rerum et Corporum custodes esse, qui nominis sunt haeredes? Jam igitur omnem Augustinum habetis, jam universam illius rem ac Familiam tenetis. Neque deest vobis omni studio Pater, nec deficit in aliquo benefacto Deus. Unum vero est mansuetudinis jugum, unaque humilitatis regula, cui primus ipse fuit subjectus, neque ejus propositi poeniteret. Ex his rebus, mihi credite, vos quoque prima crementa accepistis. His institutis Majores ac Patres vestri per orbem terrarum clarissimum nomen habuerunt. Siquidem recte putant omnes, non Religionis modo, verum etiam ceterarum virtutum fundamentum in humilitate esse. Quod si quis verbis potius, aut cultu et fronte gloriam suam jactat, a veritate ad superstitionem animum reducens, ejus profecto, ut Apostolus Jacobus;

inquit, *vana est Religio*. Mea quidem sententia, si Patris Augustini praecepta servaveritis, nullum hominum genus fuerit nullius Regulae institutio, cujus sanctitati vobis invidendum sit. Verumnescio quid vobis metuam, etc.

Omittimus quae hic habet Pontifex, Eremitis Augustinentibus propriae Regulae observantiam, pacem et humilitatem commendans, quae quidem fere duas ex his nostris paginis occuparent.

Ita si quid ipsi coetui vestro proficere possumus, Fratris, omnes existimate nobis curae esse, qui omni opere vestram Religionem foveamus; ut nihil jam interesse placeat inter Presbyteros, et vestrae Regulae Professores; ne qui estis ad communem Ecclesiae utilitatem constituti, ex sociis membris indigne damnum feratis. Illa enim prorsus abominanda est insolentia, Religiosis Religionem invidere, aut non posse pauperem inopiam pati, aut denique se meliorem ducere, quod potior quisquam velit haberi. Tantum et ipsi date operam, ut per Conventus vestros quieti sitis, ac quisque Religionis suae negotium expleat, ac vos praesertim, qui tanto Patre gaudetis.

XIV. Jam enim nulla dubitatio est, quin vobis Augustinus in primis sit, non eo modo, quod illius nomen singulari honore sectamini: verum iudicio nostro hoc potissimum causae est, quod ad vos una cum Filio Mater accessit, tanquam indigne ferret, non iis corpore praesentem esse, qui se digna Religione honorarent. Prospexit credo velut errantes parvulos, ut in sinum ipsa quoque Nepotes acciperet. Nondum enim cuiquam, nisi vobis haec sancta dicata est, nec alteri, quam Ordini vestro cessit. Multi tamen ad Augustini omen subiere, jam de ipsa Religionis dignitate certantes; quasi solis hic honor debeatur, quem velut primi adfectant. Sed alius hic locus est. Ipsa quidem Mater solos elegit, quos tanquam Filio cognatos adsumeret, sponte in Ordine vestrum succedens. Utinam eo tempore quaesita esset, cum majore numero erastis per orbem terrarum frequentiores! Nihil profecto in ore hominum plus esset. Nam quae mulier Religionem expetens, nolit inter Beatae Monicae dicatas censi? Quis hominum sub alio potius debeat, quam sub Augustino capite velle tueri Religionem? Hinc enim reliqua proficisitur excellentia, modo se velint Fratres facti ad ipsius Patris exemplum conformes facere. Nempe si magna est Philosophorum gloria, ubi clarissimi alicujus Princi-

pis discipuli et sectatores dicantur, ut videatur huic magnificentum, si se Pythagoricum referat, alteri quod Socraticum aut Platonicum; quanta vobis, et quam merita vestrae Religionis laus est, Augustinum ducem ac Parentem habuisse!

XV. Accipite igitur cum Patre Matrem, accipite cum Filio Genitricem. Utamini quantum juste libet alterutro; nam utriusque eadem fuerit disciplina, eadem regula, eadem institutio. Denique hunc diem vobis solemnem facite, atque ita in posteros, concedentibus, volentibus, suadentibus nobis, transmittite. Hinc quantis potestis vocibus Sanctissimæ hujus Matris praesentiam et gloriam declarate. Postremo omnes quoscumque inveneritis claudos ac debiles ad coelestia auxilia captanda invitate. Nec silueritis, quæ his diebus Romæ apud beatum hoc Sepulcrum edita sunt. Mulierem nomine Silviam ex intolerabili dolore capitis, facto voto, continuo liberatam. Mariolam aliam vestri Fratris sororem jam tumore mamillarum una et maxima febris morti pene vicinam, tactu Sepulcri mox sanatam. Puerum illum sumto toxico morientem, a parentibus huic Sanctæ non prius commendatum, quam sanatum. Aliam nobilem Romanam simul et paralyticam et morbo comitiali, quem caducum appellant, vexatam, tacto Sepulcro, mox ad integram sanitatem restitutam. Quid dicam sterilem illam uxorem fabri, qui Sepulcri ejus ferramenta confecerat, expresso ad Sepulcrum voto, paullo post concepisse? Quid eundem fabrum pene caecum, consimili voto splendidum lumen accepisse? Quid aliam puellam lethalis pestilentiae morbo correptam, ac prodito gerendi hujus vestri habitus more mulierum voto, continuo ex omni periculo ereptam? Quid alios complures variis morbis ac magnis febribus per hujus auxilia dimissos? Praecipue vero quos ex caecitate ac tenebris in lucem reddidit? Recte hanc opem sibi adsumsit, vel quod illius Doctoris Mater est, qui doctrinae suae radiis universum orbem adhuc illustrat; vel item quod propter eundem, ut superna luce servaretur, viginti continuis annis apud Deum piissimas lacrymas effudit, et quæ aliquando moestis oculis dixit: *Heu, filii mei Augustini mortem plango*: nunc dicat: *Eia me felicem, quæ per Augustinum filium universo orbi lumen pando.*

XVI. Haec vos, Fratres mei, auctoribus nobis nuntiate gentibus; simul ipsi tanto supernae gratiae munere gaudete; ac

vos praeterea dignos, vel tam Beatae Matris, vel tanti Parentis et Doctoris filios discipulosque gerite. Omnes ita genus vestrum mirentur: omnes vitae vestrae instituta laudent. Denique omnibus Religio vestra placeat: atque his rebus sperate vobis omnia majora et ampliora succedere. Non deseret enim Deus quos tantis donis insignes fecit; non relinquet Filios, quibus tam Beatos, tamque illustres Parentes dedit. Ita fiet laborantibus ac devotis omnia parata; modo hinc Religiosae vitae formam sumatis; ipsique ceteris exemplo sitis, quo in manibus vestris glorificetur Deus, Ordoque ad insignem numerum, ac dignam Capite nobilitatem celsitudinemque evadat. Tum ipsi videbimur idoneo loco nostrae concessionis munus statuisse, si diligentes ac sollicitos servandae hujus gratiae agnoverimus. Atque illi puto gratissimum ac jocundissimum fuerit intelligenti, se optimorum Filiorum gremio receptum. Hac itaque cogitatione spem vestram erigite; his conciliis Ordinem vestrum confirmate; hac religione caritatem vestram adornate. Ipsi vero laeti spectabimus; nos pietatem vestram studiosa sinceritate observabimus; denique vobiscum tantae felicitatis gaudia celebrabimus.

NOTE IV.—OPENING OF THE TWO NEW SANCTUARIES OF ST. MONICA, THE ONE AT THAGASTE, THE OTHER AT HIPPO.

The first Bishop of Constantine, Mgr. de Las-Cases, had scarcely ascended the restored Episcopal See, formerly occupied by St. Augustine, when he resolved to open two new sanctuaries, august indeed! for the use of Christian mothers, the one at Thagaste, and the other at Hippo.

He addressed the following letter to the Association of Christian Mothers:

“LADIES:

“I regard your Association as one of the most important of the present day, and am not surprised that it has met with universal approval; that it has spread throughout each portion of the globe, and enlisted one hundred and fifty thousand Christian mothers into its ranks. Mothers, I have the happiness of offering a fresh stimulus to your zeal, by opening to your Association two sanctuaries, whence your maternal supplications will ascend with more potency and greater efficacy.

"Henceforth two chapels are specially consecrated to you use, the one at Thagaste, where St. Monica shed so many tears, the other at Hippo, where her tears bore such an abundant harvest.

"I decree and command, that in both sanctuaries a Mass shall be said daily for the perseverance, or for the reclaiming of the children in whose salvation you are so deeply and rightly interested.

"All the particular indulgences with which the Holy Father has deigned to enrich these two new sanctuaries I make over to you, to your husbands, and especially to your sons.

"Rest assured, Christian mothers, that from that land formerly so renowned, from that shore of old so fruitful in saints, will be wafted the spirit of innocence, or of regeneration, of fidelity, or of repentance. Augustine will speak, his voice will be heard; Monica will pour forth her sighs, those sighs which always effect conversion."

And after these touching words, the venerable bishop adds, with a modesty and amiability which have affected us deeply :

"The idea just realized by me has, I am pleased to say, been already suggested by others.

"St. Francis of Sales said to the afflicted mothers of his day : 'Ladies, if you desire to be truly Christian mothers, fix your gaze on St. Monica.' Also : 'Read St. Monica's Life; you will there see the care she bestowed on her Augustine, and find much to console you.'

"In the biography of this illustrious Saint, which M. l'abbé Bougaud has written with such pathos and skill, is one passage which strikes me very forcibly, for is it not, indeed, both a pre-
 sage and an announcement of that which I have just accomplished? 'It was impossible for this Association of Christian mothers to meet in prayer, on behalf of their erring sons, without remembering St. Monica. She was in their thoughts from the very first, but they had selected six or seven patrons, and St. Monica's name was the last on the list. But in the course of time she began gradually to emerge from obscurity; she appeared above the horizon, and so sweet and pure was her light that, after the Blessed Virgin, who stands unrivalled in her sanctity, St. Monica became the *chief confidante, patroness, refuge, and grand protectress of Christian mothers.*'

"You will therefore doubtless appreciate the value of the gift I bestow on you. I am already assured of this, for several mothers, on learning from me that they would henceforth be able to associate their fears, and mingle their sighs and tears with those of St. Monica, thanked me with effusion of tears, and were unable to find words in which to express the degree of encouragement, strength, and consolation with which my pious project had inspired them."

These beautiful and touching words, which fall as a benediction on our volume, and which were accompanied by marks of the most delicate kindness, awoke the following grateful and respectful response on our part :

" PARIS, *March 17, 1869.*

" MONSEIGNEUR :

"I much regret being absent from Orleans when you sent M. l'abbé Caussanel to pay me a visit ; and more deeply do I regret not having been at home when your grace recently called. I was preaching during Lent at the Madeleine, and therefore had no opportunity of thanking you for your mandatory letter, and the kindness which dictated it.

"For many years, Monseigneur, it well behoved you to take the initiative in presenting the Association of Christian Mothers with those two new sanctuaries at Thagaste and at Hippo, which sanctuaries will henceforth rank as the most august of all.

"You have lived in the world, Monseigneur ; you know whether Christian mothers stand in need of consolation. And, as a bishop, and a successor of St. Augustine, having received at your consecration, among other gifts, grace to appreciate the treasures of your Church, and the benefits accruing therefrom to the Universal Church, you know far better than any one else does what St. Monica was, and the deep wells of consolation and of hope to be found in those two words : Thagaste and Hippo.

"Thagaste ! at this word there start to mind the sorrows and disenchantments of marriage in which true unity was wanting ; silent tears, untiring prayers, poignant anxiety, as well as the joy of conversion, and the ineffable raptures attending a death-bed. Thagaste means a husband's soul saved by dint of love.

“ Hippo ! It may be that St. Monica’s eyes never beheld thee, save perhaps during her moments of ecstasy when at Ostia ; for who can say whether it was not a vision of Hippo which so gladdened that mother’s heart that she died of joy ! However this may be, Hippo not only recalls the conversion of the lost son, that son of so many tears ; but virtue, sanctity, genius, penitence, and love, flourishing where formerly there was naught but evil. It recalls Augustine, the priest, bishop, and doctor. The greatest doctor the Church owns was purchased for her by a mother’s tears !

“ Monseigneur, wives and mothers will ever bless you for what you have done, and when they turn their tearful eyes to the sanctuaries erected by you at Thagaste and at Hippo, the sight will strengthen and console them ; full of faith and fresh energy, they will not forget that land whence came their help ; they will not forget your arduous labors, the churches you have built, the souls you have saved, the little orphans whom famine has thrown on your hands, and they will offer their prayers and their alms on behalf of him who reads a mother’s heart so well.

“ Accept, Monseigneur, the assurance of my deepest respect and devotion.

“ EM. BOUGAUD, *Vicar-General.*”

