

Not to dwell further on this part of Monica's history, we anticipate the glorious reaping time which succeeded her tearful sowing time.

Patricius, reckless, passionate, ungodly, was ultimately touched by the power of her Christian life; and after he had been Monica's pagan husband for sixteen years, he took his place by her side at the foot of the cross, a rejoicing believer in the promise that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." He lived but a short time after the great change had passed upon his heart, but long enough to testify to the genuineness of his conversion.

And now, having gathered in some golden sheaves to the heavenly garner does this devoted woman fold her hands and dream that her work here is done? Nay she but bends her bow afresh with a firmer hand, and directs the heavenly arrows against one whose heart seemed to repel, in its hardness and degradation, every attempt to melt or subdue it. Merely glancing, as we pass, at another pagan relative—her husband's mother—whom Monica was honoured to turn to righteousness, and who, from being an avowed enemy to herself and her religion, became her grateful friend and a Christian indeed, we look now at the boy Augustine, the one cherished child of this sainted mother, and the ceaseless object of her love and prayers. Round him her blighted domestic hopes twined, and seemed to bud afresh in fond anticipation. Alas! for many weary days and nights, hope's delicate blossoms seemed crushed and buried; but it was only in the end to burst forth in resurrection beauty, and to expand in the sunshine of prayer answered and sacred longings realized.

At an early age, Augustine had indescribable pinnings after the Infinite and the Unseen. Naturally of an ambitious, ardent temperament, he laboured to excel in any chosen pursuit, and not unfrequently succeeded. But as he grew to manhood, and drank deeply of the streams of intellect and pleasure, the immortal craving remained unsatisfied. Giving the reins to his carnal desires, he threw himself on the dark broad stream which, with every heaving wave, rolled him nearer to the abyss of death. He drank deeply and long of the turbid waters, but the thirst was still unquenched, the immortal part was void. How could it be otherwise? How can any created thing fill a soul which was formed for its Creator Himself?

"That which hath life alone can fill the living;  
That which hath love alone can fill the loving."

At Tagaste, at Madaura, and at Carthage, where he attended the public seminaries of learning, Augustine's sins grew in number and aggravation, and his poor mother's heart grew sadder and sorer. In the midst, however, of the clouds of this dark period of her history, there were here and there streaks of sunlight streaming across the gloom. Her sweet, hopeful spirit hailed them as tokens for good. An occasional relenting on Augustine's part, a word of encouragement spoken to herself, put the spur into the side of this gentle woman's prayerful effort, and she thanked God and took courage.

The darkest, coldest moment in our night is just before the dawn. So, at the very moment when Augustine seemed to have drained the last dregs of sin, and to be beyond the hope of every heart save that of his praying mother, the crisis came, the scales fell from his eyes. The very excess of his wickedness made him wretched, nay, odious to himself. His ambitious desires were unrealized; his mind, hastening from one system of error to another, had become like a dark, dreary cavern, wherein winds and tempests howled, when, lo! the prayers of many years were answered, and this poor burdened sinner was led to the "wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died." As he looked, the burden fell from his back; as he stood shivering and naked, a gentle hand plucked away his rags, and clothed him with a royal robe; as he listened, he heard a voice say, "Live;" and, to use his own language, "a light of serenity was, as it were, infused into my heart, and all the darkness of doubt vanished away." He had found a home for his restless, anguished heart in the clefts of the Rock of Ages.

He had chased the mirage, and detected its deception. He had hitherto been feeding on the world's husks, when there was bread enough and to spare in his Father's house. But now, drawn by the cords of everlasting love, he has returned to that Father's home, and the voice of rejoicing is heard.