

## BOOK II

## Adolescence

1 (1) I intend to remind myself of my past foulnesses and carnal corruptions, not because I love them but so that I may love you, my God. It is from love of your love that I make the act of recollection. The recalling of my wicked ways is bitter in my memory, but I do it so that you may be sweet to me, a sweetness touched by no deception, a sweetness serene and content. You gathered me together from the state of disintegration in which I had been fruitlessly divided. I turned from unity in you to be lost in multiplicity.<sup>1</sup>

At one time in adolescence I was burning to find satisfaction in hellish pleasures. I ran wild in the shadowy jungle of erotic adventures. 'My beauty wasted away and in your sight I became putrid' (Dan. 10: 8), by pleasing myself and by being ambitious to win human approval.

ii (2) The single desire that dominated my search for delight was simply to love and to be loved. But no restraint was imposed by the exchange of mind with mind, which marks the brightly lit pathway of friendship. Clouds of muddy carnal concupiscence filled the air. The bubbling impulses of puberty befogged and obscured my heart so that it could not see the difference between love's serenity and lust's darkness. Confusion of the two things boiled within me. It seized hold of my youthful weakness sweeping me through the precipitous rocks of desire to submerge me in a whirlpool of vice.<sup>2</sup> Your wrath was heavy upon me and I was unaware of it. I had become deafened by the clanking chain<sup>3</sup> of my mortal condition, the penalty of my pride. I travelled very far from you, and you did not stop me. I was tossed about and spilt, scattered and boiled dry in my fornications. And you were silent. How slow I was to find my joy! At that time you said nothing, and I travelled much further away from

you into more and more sterile things productive of unhappiness, proud in my self-pity, incapable of rest in my exhaustion.

(3) If only someone could have imposed restraint on my disorder. That would have transformed to good purpose the fleeting experiences of beauty in these lowest of things, and fixed limits to indulgence in their charms. Then the stormy waves of my youth would have finally broken on the shore of marriage. Even so, I could not have been wholly content to confine sexual union to acts intended to procreate children, as your law prescribes, Lord. For you shape the propagation of our mortal race, imposing your gentle hand to soften the brambles which were excluded from your paradise.<sup>4</sup> Your omnipotence is never far from us, even when we are far from you.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, I ought to have paid more vigilant heed to the voice from your clouds: 'Nevertheless those who are married shall have trouble in the flesh, and I would spare you' (Cor. 7: 28), and 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman' (1 Cor. 7: 1), and 'He who has no wife thinks on the things of God, how he can please God. But he who is joined in marriage thinks on the affairs of the world, how he can please his wife' (1 Cor. 7: 32-3). Had I paid careful attention to these sayings and 'become a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19: 12), I would have been happier finding fulfilment in your embraces.

(4) But I in my misery seethed and followed the driving force of my impulses, abandoning you. I exceeded all the bounds set by your law, and did not escape your chastisement—indeed no mortal can do so. For you were always with me, mercifully punishing me, touching with a bitter taste all my illicit pleasures. Your intention was that I should seek delights unspoilt by disgust and that, in my quest where I could achieve this, I should discover it to be in nothing except you Lord, nothing but you. You 'fashion pain to be a lesson' (Ps. 93: 20 LXX), you 'strike to heal', you bring death upon us so that we should not die apart from you (Deut. 32: 39).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Augustine's vision of the sex-life of Adam and Eve before the Fall passed from belief that their union was wholly spiritual (below XIII. xx (28)) to a conviction that it was both spiritual and physical, but controlled by reason and will, never by unreasoning passion, and wholly free of the thorny problems that beset sexuality in common experience.

<sup>2</sup> The Neoplatonist Porphyry wrote: 'He who knows God has God present to him, and he who does not know him is absent from him who is everywhere present.' (*Ad Gaurum* 12. 3). Cf. above, II. ii (3).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above I. v. (6). The beneficence of punishment is affirmed in 2 Macc. 6: 12-16.

<sup>1</sup> The language here is characteristic of Porphyry (e.g. *ep. ad Marcellam* 10, p. 280, 25 Nauck) and Plotinus 6. 6. 1. 5. See below XI. xxix (39).

<sup>2</sup> Echo of Virgil, *Aeneid* 3. 422 (Scylla and Charybdis).

<sup>3</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 6. 558.

Where was I in the sixteenth year of the age of my flesh? 'Far away in exile from the pleasures of your house' (Mic. 2: 9). Sensual folly assumed domination over me, and I gave myself totally to it in acts allowed by shameful humanity but under your laws illicit. My family did not try to extricate me from my headlong course by means of marriage. The only concern was that I should learn to speak as effectively as possible and carry conviction by my oratory.

iii (5) During my sixteenth year there was an interruption in my studies. I was recalled from Madauros, the nearby town where I had first lived away from home to learn literature and oratory. During that time funds were gathered in preparation for a more distant absence at Carthage, for which my father had more enthusiasm than cash, since he was a citizen of Thagaste with very modest resources.<sup>7</sup> To whom do I tell these things? Not to you, my God. But before you I declare this to my race, to the human race, though only a tiny part can light on this composition of mine. And why do I include this episode? It is that I and any of my readers may reflect on the great depth from which we have to cry to you (Ps. 129: 1). Nothing is nearer to your ears than a confessing heart and a life grounded in faith (cf. Rom. 10: 9). At that time everybody was full of praise for my father because he spent money on his son beyond the means of his estate, when that was necessary to finance an education entailing a long journey. Many citizens of far greater wealth did nothing of the kind for their children. But this same father did not care what character before you I was developing, or how chaste I was so long as I possessed a cultured tongue—though my culture really meant a desert uncultivated by you, God. You are the one true and good lord of your land, which is my heart.

(6) In my sixteenth year idleness interposed because of my family's lack of funds. I was on holiday from all schooling and lived with my parents. The thorns of lust rose above my head, and there was no hand to root them out. Indeed, when at the bathhouse my father saw that I was showing signs of virility and the stirrings of adolescence,

<sup>7</sup> Augustine's biographer, Possidius, records that his father Patrick sat on the town council or *curia* of Thagaste, a position bringing social credit and financial burdens. The estate was not large, and in relative terms the family was reckoned 'poor', i.e. it possessed only a few slaves for the housework and the land, which in one letter Augustine describes as 'a few acres'. Naturally Augustine's family was not poor in an absolute sense; they were far from being destitute. But 'pauper' is once defined by Ovid as 'a man who knows how many sheep he has'. Patrick is likely to have known how many he had.

he was overjoyed to suppose that he would now be having grandchildren, and told my mother so. His delight was that of the intoxication which makes the world oblivious of you, its Creator, and to love your creation instead of you. He was drunk with the invisible wine of his perverse will directed downwards to inferior things.<sup>8</sup> But in my mother's heart you had already begun your temple and the beginning of your holy habitation (Ecclus. 24: 14). My father was still a catechumen and had become that only recently. So she shook with a pious trepidation and a holy fear (2 Cor. 7: 15). For, although I had not yet become a baptized believer, she feared the twisted paths along which walk those who turn their backs and not their face towards you (Jer. 2: 27).

(7) Wretch that I am, do I dare to say that you, my God, were silent when in reality I was travelling farther from you? Was it in this sense that you kept silence to me? Then whose words were they but yours which you were chanting in my ears through my mother, your faithful servant? But nothing of that went down into my heart to issue in action. Her concern (and in the secret of my conscience I recall the memory of her admonition delivered with vehement anxiety) was that I should not fall into fornication, and above all that I should not commit adultery with someone else's wife. These warnings seemed to me womanish advice which I would have blushed to take the least notice of. But they were your warnings and I did not realize it. I believed you were silent, and that it was only she who was speaking, when you were speaking to me through her. In her you were scorned by me, by me her son, the son of your handmaid, your servant (Ps. 115: 16). But I did not realize this and went on my way headlong with such blindness that among my peer group I was ashamed not to be equally guilty of shameful behaviour when I heard them boasting of their sexual exploits. Their pride was the more aggressive, the more debauched their acts were; they derived pleasure not merely from the lust of the act but also from the admiration it evoked. What is more worthy of censure than vice? Yet I went deeper into vice to avoid being despised, and when there was no act by admitting to which I could rival my depraved companions, I used to pretend I had done things I had not done at

<sup>8</sup> Augustine's father celebrated the signs of his son's virility by becoming inebriated. The implications of this passage on Patrick's hopes for a grandchild appear the only evidence to suggest that Augustine was the eldest of the children.

all, so that my innocence should not lead my companions to scorn my lack of courage, and lest my chastity be taken as a mark of inferiority.<sup>9</sup>

(8) Such were the companions with whom I made my way through the streets of Babylon.<sup>10</sup> With them I rolled in its dung as if rolling in spices and precious ointments (S. of S. 5: 4: 14). To tie me down the more tenaciously to Babylon's belly, the invisible enemy trampled on me (Ps. 55: 3) and seduced me because I was in the mood to be seduced. The mother of my flesh already had fled from the centre of Babylon (Jer. 51: 6), but still lingered in the outskirts of the city. Although she had warned me to guard my virginity, she did not seriously pay heed to what her husband had told her about me, and which she felt to hold danger for the future: for she did not seek to restrain my sexual drive within the limit of the marriage bond, if it could not be cut back to the quick. The reason why she showed no such concern was that she was afraid that the hope she placed in me could be impeded by a wife. This was not the hope which my mother placed in you for the life to come, but the hope which my parents entertained for my career that I might do well out of the study of literature. Both of them, as I realized, were very ambitious for me: my father because he hardly gave a thought to you at all, and his ambitions for me were concerned with mere vanities; my mother because she thought it would do no harm and would be a help to set me on the way towards you, if I studied the traditional pattern of a literary education. That at least is my conjecture as I try to recall the characters of my parents.

The reins were relaxed to allow me to amuse myself. There was no strict discipline to keep me in check, which led to an unbridled dissoluteness in many different directions. In all of this there was a thick mist shutting me off from the brightness of your face, my God, and my iniquity as it were 'burst out from my fatness' (Ps. 72: 7).

iv (9) Theft receives certain punishment by your law (Exod. 20: 15), Lord, and by the law written in the hearts of men (Rom. 2: 14) which not even iniquity itself destroys. For what thief can with

<sup>9</sup> The theme of this paragraph is found in Ambrose, *Nouh* 22, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine's portrait of his wild years may be compared with the savage contemporary portrait of the riff-raff of Rome about 380 by the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus, who speaks of people spending their entire lives on alcohol, gambling, brothels, and public shows (28. 4. 28).

equanimity endure being robbed by another thief? He cannot tolerate it even if he is rich and the other is destitute. I wanted to carry out an act of theft and did so, driven by no kind of need other than my inner lack of any sense of, or feeling for, justice. Wickedness filled me. I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong. There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither colour nor taste. To shake the fruit off the tree and carry off the pears, I and a gang of naughty adolescents set off late at night after (in our usual pestilential way) we had continued our game in the streets. We carried off a huge load of pears. But they were not for our feasts but merely to throw to the pigs. Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed.

Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss. Now let my heart tell you what it was seeking there in that I became evil for no reason.<sup>11</sup> I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself. My depraved soul leaped down from your firmament to ruin.<sup>12</sup> I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake.

v (10) There is beauty in lovely physical objects, as in gold and silver and all other such things. When the body touches such things, much significance attaches to the rapport of the object with the touch. Each of the other senses has its own appropriate mode of response to physical things. Temporal honour and the power of giving orders and of being in command have their own kind of dignity, though this is also the origin of the urge to self-assertion. Yet in the acquisition of all these sources of social status, one must not depart from you, Lord, nor deviate from your law. The life which we live in this world has its attractiveness because of a certain measure in its beauty and its harmony with all these inferior objects that are beautiful. Human friendship is also a nest of love and gentleness because of the unity it brings about between

<sup>11</sup> Echo of Sallust's language about Catiline. Augustine presents himself as a new Catiline.

<sup>12</sup> Like Lucifer.

many souls. Yet sin is committed for the sake of all these things and others of this kind when, in consequence of an immoderate urge towards those things which are at the bottom end of the scale of good,<sup>13</sup> we abandon the higher and supreme goods, that is you, Lord God, and your truth and your law (Ps. 118: 142). These inferior goods have their delights, but not comparable to my God who has made them all. It is in him that the just person takes delight; he is the joy of those who are true of heart (Ps. 63: 11).

(11) When a crime is under investigation to discover the motive for which it was done, the accusation is not usually believed except in cases where the appetite to obtain (or the fear of losing) one of those goods which we have called inferior appears a plausible possibility. They are beautiful and attractive even if, in comparison with the higher goods which give true happiness, they are mean and base. A man committed murder. Why? Because he loved another's wife or his property; or he wanted to acquire money to live on by plundering his goods; or he was afraid of losing his own property by the action of his victim; or he had suffered injury and burned with desire for revenge. No one would commit murder without a motive, merely because he took pleasure in killing. Who would believe that? It was said of one brutal and cruel man [Catiline] that he was evil and savage without reason.<sup>14</sup> Yet the preceding passage gave the motive: 'lest disuse might make his hand or mind slow to react'. Why did he wish for that? Why so? His objective was to capture the city by violent crimes to obtain honours, government, and wealth; to live without fear of the laws and without the difficulty of attaining his ambitions because of the poverty of his family estate and his known criminal record. No, not even Catiline himself loved his crimes; something else motivated him to commit them.

vi (12) Wretch that I was, what did I love in you, my act of theft, that crime which I did at night in the sixteenth year of my life? There was nothing beautiful about you, my thieving. Indeed do you exist at all for me to be addressing you?

The fruit which we stole was beautiful because it was your creation, most beautiful of all Beings, maker of all things, the good

<sup>13</sup> Throughout his writings Augustine holds to a doctrine of gradations of goodness. The good of the body is inferior to that of the soul; the will, in itself midway, may turn to higher or to lower things, and may err by preferring inferior goods to superior.

<sup>14</sup> Sallust, *Catiline* 16 (also cited by Augustine, *Sermon on Ps. 108*, 3).

God, God the highest good and my true good. The fruit was beautiful, but was not that which my miserable soul coveted. I had a quantity of better pears. But those I picked solely with the motive of stealing. I threw away what I had picked. My feasting was only on the wickedness which I took pleasure in enjoying. If any of those pears entered my mouth, my criminality was the piquant sauce. And now, Lord my God, I inquire what was the nature of my pleasure in the theft. The act has nothing lovely about it, none of the loveliness found in equity and prudence, or in the human mind whether in the memory or in the senses or in physical vitality. Nor was it beautiful in the way the stars are, noble in their courses, or earth and sea full of newborn creatures which, as they are born, take the place of those which die;<sup>15</sup> not even in the way that specious vices have a flawed reflection of beauty.

(13) Pride imitates what is lofty; but you alone are God most high above all things. What does ambition seek but honour and glory? Yet you alone are worthy of honour and are glorious for eternity. The cruelty of powerful people aims to arouse fear. Who is to be feared but God alone? What can be seized or stolen from his power? When or where or how or by whom? Soft endearments are intended to arouse love. But there are no caresses tenderer than your charity, and no object of love is more healthy than your truth, beautiful and luminous beyond all things. Curiosity appears to be a zeal for knowledge; yet you supremely know all. Ignorance and stupidity are given the names of simplicity and innocence; but there is no greater simplicity than in you. And what greater innocence than yours, whereas to evil men their own works are damaging? Idleness appears as desire for a quiet life; yet can rest be assured apart from the Lord? Luxury wants to be called abundance and satiety; but you are fullness and the inexhaustible treasure of incorruptible pleasure. Prodigality presents itself under the shadow of generosity; but you are the rich bestower of all good things. Avarice wishes to have large possessions; you possess everything. Envy contends about excellence; but what is more excellent than you? Anger seeks revenge; who avenges with greater justice than you? Fear quails before sudden and unexpected events attacking things which are

<sup>15</sup> Augustine regarded the cycle of birth and death as 'beautiful'; i.e. death is evil to the individual, not to the race.

loved, and takes precautions for their safety; to you is anything unexpected or sudden? Or who can take away from you what you love? There is no reliable security except with you. Regret wastes away for the loss of things which cupidity delighted in. Its wish would be that nothing be taken away, just as nothing can be taken from you.

(14) So the soul fornicates (Ps. 72: 27) when it is turned away from you and seeks outside you the pure and clear intentions which are not to be found except by returning to you. In their perverted way all humanity imitates you. Yet they put themselves at a distance from you and exalt themselves against you. But even by thus imitating you they acknowledge that you are the creator of all nature and so concede that there is no place where one can entirely escape from you. Therefore in that act of theft what was the object of my love, and in what way did I viciously and perversely imitate my Lord? Was my pleasure to break your law, but by deceit since I had not the power to do that by force? Was I acting like a prisoner with restricted liberty who does without punishment what is not permitted, thereby making an assertion of possessing a dim resemblance to omnipotence? Here is a runaway slave fleeing his master and pursuing a shadow (Job 7: 2). What rottenness! What a monstrous life and what an abyss of death! Was it possible to take pleasure in what was illicit for no reason other than that it was not allowed?

vii (15) 'What shall I render to the Lord?' (Ps. 115: 2) who recalls these things to my memory, but my soul feels no fear from the recollection. I will love you, Lord, and I will give thanks and confession to your name because you have forgiven me such great evils and my nefarious deeds. I attribute to your grace and mercy that you have melted my sins away like ice (Ecclus. 3: 17). I also attribute to your grace whatever evil acts I have not done. What could I not have done when I loved gratuitous crime? I confess that everything has been forgiven, both the evil things I did of my own accord, and those which I did not do because of your guidance.

No one who considers his frailty would dare to attribute to his own strength his chastity and innocence, so that he has less cause to love you—as if he had less need of your mercy by which you forgive the sins of those converted to you. If man is called by you, follows your voice, and has avoided doing those acts which I am recalling

and avowing in my own life, he should not mock the healing of a sick man by the Physician, whose help has kept him from falling sick, or at least enabled him to be less gravely ill. He should love you no less, indeed even more; for he sees that the one who delivered me from the great sicknesses of my sins is also he through whom he may see that he himself has not been a victim of the same great sicknesses.

viii (16) 'What fruit had I, wretched boy, in these things (Rom. 6: 21) which I now blush to recall, above all in that theft in which I loved nothing but the theft itself? The theft itself was a nothing, and for that reason I was the more miserable. Yet had I been alone I would not have done it—I remember my state of mind to be thus at the time—alone I would never have done it. Therefore my love in that act was to be associated with the gang in whose company I did it. Does it follow that I loved something other than the theft? No, nothing else in reality because association with the gang is also a nothing. What is it in reality? Who can teach me that, but he who 'illuminates my heart' (Ecclus. 2: 10) and disperses the shadows in it? What else has stirred my mind to ask and discuss and consider this question? If I had liked the pears which I stole and actually desired to enjoy them, I could by myself have committed that wicked act, had it been enough to attain the pleasure which I sought. I would not have needed to inflame the itch of my cupidity through the excitement generated by sharing the guilt with others. But my pleasure was not in the pears; it was in the crime itself, done in association with a sinful group.

ix (17) What was my state of mind? It is quite certain that it was utterly shameful and a disgrace to me that I had it. Yet what was it? 'Who understands his sins?' (Job 10: 15). It was all done for a giggle, as if our hearts were tickled to think we were deceiving those who would not think us capable of such behaviour and would have profoundly disapproved. Why then did I derive pleasure from an act I would not have done on my own? Is it that nobody can easily laugh when alone? Certainly no one readily laughs when alone; yet sometimes laughter overcomes individuals when no one else is present if their senses or their mind perceive something utterly absurd. But alone I would not have done it, could not conceivably have done it by myself. See, before you, my God, the living memory of

my soul. Alone I would not have committed that crime, in which my pleasure lay not in what I was stealing but in the act of theft. But had I been alone, it would have given me absolutely no pleasure, nor would I have committed it. Friendship can be a dangerous enemy, a seduction of the mind lying beyond the reach of investigation.<sup>16</sup> Out of a game and a jest came an avid desire to do injury and an appetite to inflict loss on someone else without any motive on my part of personal gain, and no pleasure in settling a score. As soon as the words are spoken 'Let us go and do it', one is ashamed not to be shameless.

x (18) Who can untie this extremely twisted and tangled knot? It is a foul affair, I have no wish to give attention to it; I have no desire to contemplate it. My desire is for you, justice and innocence, you are lovely and splendid to honest eyes; the satiety of your love is insatiable. With you is utter peace and a life immune from disturbance. The person who enters into you 'enters into the joy of the Lord' (Matt. 25: 21), and will not be afraid; he will find himself in the supreme Good where it is supremely good to be. As an adolescent I went astray from you (Ps. 118: 76), my God, far from your unmoved stability. I became to myself a region of destitution.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Similarly IX. ii. (2).

<sup>17</sup> The Prodigal Son is fused with a Neoplatonic theme of the soul's destitution without God, which is taken up at the beginning of book III and again in VII. x (16). Destitution in the soul distant from God is a theme in Porphyry (*De abstinentia* 3. 27 and *Sententiae* 40), based on Plato's *Symposium*.