

# AUGUSTINE

## THE FARMER'S BOY OF TAGASTE

P. DE ZEEUW, J.Gzn



INHERITANCE PUBLICATIONS  
NEERLANDIA, ALBERTA, CANADA

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction .....	6
1. "Where Have The Pears Gone?" .....	7
2. School Boy In Madaura .....	14
3. Urchin In Tagaste .....	20
4. Student At Carthage .....	25
5. "Augustine, You Ought To Be Ashamed" .....	30
6. Monica Expels Her Son From Her House .....	35
7. The Death Of A Friend .....	41
8. Augustine Deceives His Mother .....	45
9. Rome: A Bitter Disappointment .....	51
10. Augustine In Milan .....	56
11. Under The Fig Tree .....	60
12. A Winter In Cassiciacum .....	64
13. Monica Goes Home .....	69
14. Bishop Of Hippo .....	76
15. Augustine And The Little Boy .....	84
16. War In The Land .....	87
17. Taken Up .....	92



## INTRODUCTION

You must never think of Augustine as Roman Catholic. He belonged to the one, at that time undivided, universal Christian Church and indeed fought against Roman Catholic deviations. Many unscriptural ideas had as early as the fourth century crept into the Christian Church. Yet many of her members continued in the desire to serve the Lord faithfully, according to His Word. They warned against heresies and ungodly practices.

One of the men who stood for the scriptural truth and defended it against many heretics was Augustine. Therefore it is right that you should know him as one of the great teachers of the Christian Church, next to Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Augustine was born on November 13, A.D. 354.

P. de Zeeuw, J.Gzn.,  
*Nijkerk (the Netherlands)*

## CHAPTER ONE

### "WHERE HAVE THE PEARS GONE?"

The whip in the teacher's hand swept through the air and came to a sudden stop on the back of Augustine, who was yet again pulling one of his stunts. The boy cried out in pain. It was not the first lashing of the morning either. He had received several already.

Augustine was at a complete loss.

Last night he had prayed! His mother, the pious Monica, had told him that prayer always helped. Augustine did not really believe it for one minute. He preferred to agree with his father Patricius, who found it much easier to remain a heathen. But after he had been hit by the teacher every single day, he thought it wise to try his mother's suggestion about praying. What if he asked the Lord to stop him from being hit so often? It might just mean the end of all his troubles! He had stuck to his plan, and last night in bed he had told the Lord all about his problem.

This morning he had gone to school in good spirits. Now it would all be different! "Prayer works!" That was what his mother told him, and she should know. Did she not always attend the church in Tagaste? She even prayed at home. She was a God-fearing woman. His father Patricius laughed about her faith, but he never stopped her.

As it turned out, his mother had not known at all!

As the whip landed on his back a few more times, the boy decided never to pray again. After all, it



had done him no good whatsoever. In fact, this morning he had been given even more lashes than usual! No, prayer was not for him. He was convinced of that.

When Augustine looked around he saw only grinning faces. Apparently the other students were of the opinion that he deserved all he had been given. Well, they would find out. As soon as he could, Augustine would get even with them!

His mother asked him, "How is it Augustine, that you are always getting punished at school, while your elder brother Navigius is hardly ever in trouble?"

"Navigius is a goody-goody. He always does exactly what the teacher says," the boy had answered.

"That is what you should do too."

"I can't. I hate school. I would much rather be outside in the fields."

"But my dear, that won't work. You need your education. You have to learn something."

"I know, but it takes much too long. It is always the same, again and again. And I already know it all."

Mother Monica sighed deeply.

It was all true. If Augustine read a psalm just once, he was able to repeat it by heart. He was a very fast learner. That was why he disliked school so much.

When the boy came home that evening, he screamed: "I never want to go back to school! I think it is a prison for slaves—a hole!"

Up to a point the boy was right. What was called a school was in fact no more than a rough shelter. Old tarpaulins protected the children from sun or rain while they sat on rickety stools or discarded, worn-out mats. The place really was boring, and if

on top of that you were lashed every day, you would soon be fed up.

That night Augustine lay awake for a long time. He just had to do something, but what? Prayer was out! He knew all about that! Staying away from school seemed the best thing to do, but would it be possible? Certainly not if father Patricius was home. His father was a kind of gentleman-farmer who did very little more than watch his slaves, hunt, ride his horse, and generally make sure that he was indeed a gentleman. He was also one of Tagaste's city councillors.

When Augustine finally fell asleep, it was with a vague plan to stay away from school if the opportunity presented itself.

That is exactly what happened.

When he arose the next morning, he heard from the house-slaves that his father had left earlier and would be away hunting all that day. Certainly a step in the right direction. Then his sister told him that Mother had gone into the city to visit the poor. She often did that. Although Patricius was not really wealthy, his wife always managed to save something in order to help the poor. When she did that, she walked through the entire city. So now the coast was clear!

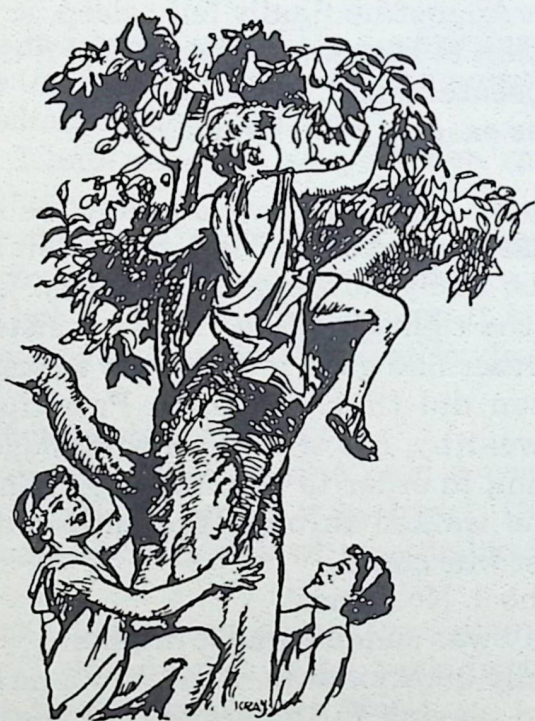
No school. No lashes!

His day was suddenly a lot brighter.

The only question was, what would he do all day? He liked playing in the street, but that was a bit dangerous right now. Just imagine what would happen if Mother Monica saw him? No, better go into the fields. The house was surrounded by orchards, and with a few of his friends, he set out on his adventure.



They had lots of fun, but their boisterous activities made them hungry, and they wanted something to eat badly. That something was not hard to find, because the trees were laden with fruit. Suddenly the truants discovered a tree full of the most delicious looking pears, the kind you never saw in Tagaste. That was not strange, because father Patricius had cultivated them himself. He had already calculated that they would bring a pretty penny, because they were indeed beautiful, juicy pears. But now the boys had discovered them.



Before long, two or three of them had reached the top of the tree. Augustine knew that it was his father's favourite tree, but he said nothing. In fact, he joined in. They picked pears until the tree was

empty. Then they began to eat them, continuing until they could not look at another pear. Afterwards they fed the leftovers to the pigs.

That was it. They'd had a wonderful day: plenty of pears, no lashes, it couldn't have been better!

In the evening when Patricius had come home from his hunting trip, he went for a walk in the orchard. The weather had been warm, but under the trees it was now lovely and cool. He decided to have another look at his pear tree. He would have the pears picked tomorrow. They should be ready now and must not become overripe.

He looked up into the tree.

What was that?

Not a single pear left in the whole tree!

"Where have the pears gone?" he murmured. Had one of the slaves picked them already? it was quite possible that Monica had ordered them to be picked. Walking slowly, he left the orchard. He passed the shed and decided to look in on the pigs. He went toward the cages and slipped on a chewed pear. Then he saw more pears in the feeding troughs. Evidently the pigs had not been able to eat all of them. He took one of them in his hand—but this was a pear of his special tree! Patricius felt his anger rising and became suspicious. What if Augustine played that trick on him? He could hardly believe it, but if he had, the boy would certainly know about it!

As soon as he came inside, he asked Monica where Augustine was.

"He has just gone to bed. But Patricius, what is wrong?" She could see that he was terribly angry, and she feared that once again Augustine had been up to no good.



"Nothing! I only want to ask him what has happened to the pears!"

"The pears? Which pears do you mean?"

"They are gone! The whole tree, empty. And the pears are in the pig troughs."

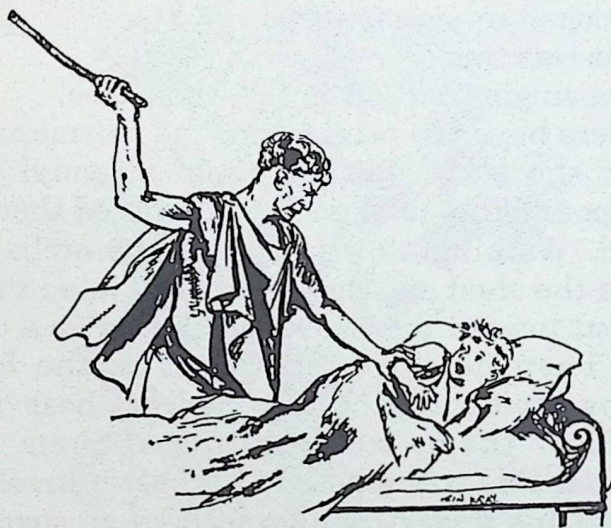
"Oh, but that is terrible!"

Patricius heard no more. He had grabbed a stick and was storming upstairs.

Augustine heard him coming and pretended to be asleep, but it was no use!

"Wake up, you!" yelled his father, while at the same time painfully introducing him to the stick.

"What have you done with my beautiful pears?"



"Ouch!" Augustine cried, "I have eaten them, Father."

"Oh yes, eaten them and given them to the pigs! Out of bed with you!"

His father continued to wield the stick, and in no time at all, Augustine was standing next to his bed looking at his father. Mother was standing behind him.

"Patricius," she cried, "no more hitting, please! You could really hurt him!"

Patricius took no notice. He was far too angry to pay any attention to his wife's pleadings.

"Tonight you will not sleep in a bed, understand?"

"Yes Father."

"But what is the boy going to do?" asked Mother Monica in a fearful voice.

"He can sleep with his friends. He and the pigs have eaten my pears! Come on! Off to the shed with you!"

As soon as he knew what his father wanted, he was off! He raced down the stairs, out of the house, and into the shed. There he spent the night huddled under some straw in the farthest corner of the cages.

His mother tried to have the punishment changed, but nothing worked. Patricius was determined to cure his son once and for all of eating his prize pears!



## CHAPTER TWO

### SCHOOL BOY IN MADAURA

"You're cheating, Augustine!"

"That's a lie, Levinus!"

"Well, I never! I saw with my own eyes that you hid the nut in your hand! Let me see!"

Augustine opened his hand, but no nut—only a small black mark.

"See!" insisted Levinus, "that is where you held the pitch ball. It has left a dirty mark on your hand!"

The boys were sitting on the stairs built along the outside of a house. They were playing a game called "Find the Nut". On one of the steps were three nutshells with a small lump of pitch, taking the place of a nut, in the middle.

They hunched around the shells and watched eagerly as agile hands quickly took the pitch and hid it under one of the shells. The others had to guess under which shell it had been hidden, but if the player hid the pitch in his hand, they would of course always guess wrong. That is what Augustine had done. Levinus was the first one to notice and yelled out: "You're cheating, Augustine!"

Augustine had won many games by cheating, but now that he had been exposed he was furious! Quick as a flash he hit Levinus in the face and Levinus promptly hit him back. The boys quickly took sides, but most of them were against Augustine because he had cheated. That is why he went home with a bloody nose and other painful reminders of the fight.

Go home—but not to mother Monica. He now lived



in Madaura, an ancient Numidic city, where Maximus, an old friend of his father had taken him in.

After the episode with the pears, both Augustine's father and mother had realized that things could not continue the way they were. Augustine could not remain in Tagaste. He would have to go somewhere else. They decided to sent him to Madaura, only a few miles from Tagaste. That was not too far, and when Maximus had promised to give him a home, things had been quickly organized. He would attend the Latin school in Madaura. On a beautiful autumn morning, Augustine, mounted on his horse, had ridden to his new home town.

Monica had been loath to see the twelve-year-old boy go. What would become of him? Oh, if only she could go with him, but that was impossible. Her duties were to her husband and the rest of the family here in Tagaste. Prayer was the only thing left to her now, and pray for Augustine she did! Every day! She knew Madaura. It was a place of sinful heathen people. There were also heathen temples in Madaura. Certainly Maximus would keep an eye on him, but would that be enough?

Studying posed no problem for Augustine. He thoroughly enjoyed it. Here he could really show his teachers what he could do, but studying did not take up all of his time. He spent much of it playing games, particularly "Find the Nut". You could win quite a bit with that, especially if you cheated. All he had won today however was a thrashing and a bloody nose. If he ever got hold of that Levinus!

When the boy arrived home, Maximus asked him what had happened.

"Fought with Levinus. That rat!"

"Ah, Levinus! Yes, he has a strong pair of hands!"



Who started, August? Naturally not you!"

"Of course not!"

"But why would he beat you like this? Wait a minute. I'll go see him and give him a piece of my mind. We cannot have him going around giving innocent boys bloody noses; what does he think he's doing?"

Maximus began to walk to the door, but that was exactly what Augustine did not want. He was sure that Levinus would expose him, so he said, "Never mind, he became upset over the game."

"Which game?"

"Find the Nut."

"Ah, now I see! You cheated did you? Yes, yes, I thought so! Levinus may be rough, he is not a cheat! That is what you are, Augustine! Of course he became angry, and I suppose this fight was the result?"

"Yes, that's about it!"

"Well, I shall personally go and thank Levinus. He has done you a favour, boy! Cheating is low, and the sooner you stop it, the better it will be for everyone, including yourself! Now go to bed before I give you a taste of my hands also!"

Augustine looked at his landlord. Was he serious? Yes, he could see in his eyes that he was, and before Maximus could put his threat into action, Augustine had fled to his room! Once there he was so preoccupied with the thought of taking revenge on Levinus that he forgot to pray.

That was not the first time either! He had made a solemn promise to Mother Monica that he would pray each evening before going to bed, but often his mind was so busy with Latin essays, games, or like right now, plans of vengeance, that he completely forgot about prayer. That night he thought for a

long time about how he would get even with Levinus, and when he finally did fall asleep, he had it all worked out!

It was a few days later.

On a large block of granite, in a field outside Madaura, stood Augustine. Several schoolchildren were grouped around him, listening attentively to what he had to say.

"Men of Carthage," he began, "Listen to your leader Hannibal, who has always led you to victory! Over there you can see the armies of your archenemies, the Romans. Their leader is the treacherous Scipio. We fear him not! Are we not Carthaginians? We shall totally destroy the Romans, and Scipio will hang from the highest tree!"

The boys smiled. Most of them knew only too well why their leader was so violently opposed to Scipio. The boy playing the role of Scipio was none other than Levinus, who, only a few days before had given Augustine such an unmerciful beating.

Augustine concluded his speech with "Long live Carthage! Let all join in the battle and destroy Scipio and the Romans!"

The armies advanced, and soon the boys were engaged in a very real battle.

Augustine, however, took little notice of that. He and a few friends had arranged to capture Levinus and give him the beating of a lifetime, and so it happened.

Augustine and his friends forced their way through the fighting hordes, and before Levinus realized it, he was surrounded by enemies. Ten against one! A cowardly trick, but Augustine hardly could care less. He was going to get even with Levinus for his bloody nose. He was out for



revenge, and he would stoop to anything to get it. In a wink, Levinus was on the ground, with fists raining down on his body, face, and legs from all directions. This cowardly attack made the boy furious, but he was in no position to do anything about it; he was completely overpowered. Augustine's fist landed in the middle of his face; blood gushed from his nose.

"That's for you," he sneered, "and remember, one thing is forever true: You hit me and I'll hit you!"

Levinus screamed, more in frustration than in pain, but in the ruckus, none of his friends noticed that he was in trouble.

Suddenly things changed. The "Romans" looked for "Hannibal" and immediately saw the group of boys attacking Levinus. They all rushed to his aid, and when they saw how he had been manhandled, their fury knew no bounds. They tore the clump of boys apart and grabbed Augustine by his hair. They had suddenly realized the real purpose of this battle, and now the great "Hannibal" was really in for a thrashing. They did not stop until his nose was bleeding as well. Then they topped it off with a black eye!

Beaten, bleeding, and with his clothes in tatters, Augustine arrived back at Maximus' house and there received a second punishment! He was sent to bed without a meal and barred from playing outside for a whole week.

However, that was not all. Augustine's teacher became involved too, because Levinus complained of his cheating and about his unfair attack during their war game. Augustine was severely punished, and only diligence, displayed in his schoolwork, prevented him from being permanently expelled from school.

# AUGUSTINE THE FARMER'S BOY OF TAGASTE

by P. de Zeeuw, J. Gzn.

Augustine was sad; why was he beaten again today? He hated school even though he was always the first one to finish his lesson. Playing and fighting he loved very much. Would this boy ever become a bishop?

P. de Zeeuw, a well-known Dutch author has written many storybooks for children, usually based on historical facts. In this biography, which he intended for children, but which many adults will also enjoy, he writes about Augustine of Hippo who lived from A.D. 354 - 430.

ISBN 0-921100-05-1

ISBN 9780921100058



9780921100058

U.S.\$7.95

Printed in Canada



INHERITANCE PUBLICATIONS  
NEERLANDIA, ALBERTA, CANADA