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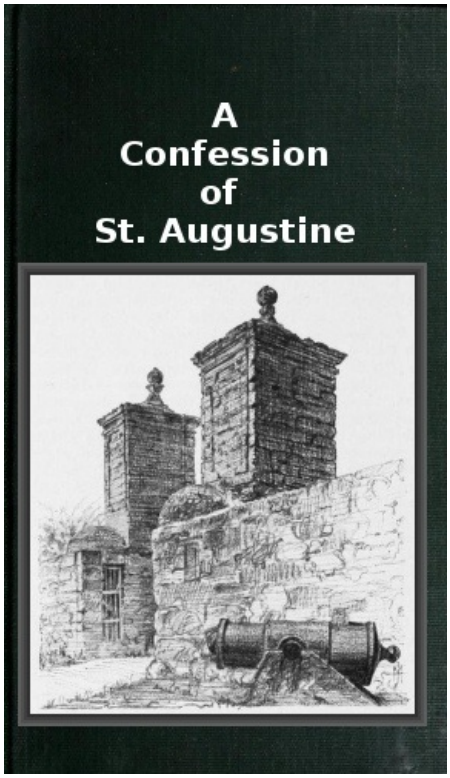

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A Confession of St. Augustine

BY W. D. HOWELLS

PART I

HEN we drove from the station up into the town, in the March of our first sojourn, and saw the palmettoes all along the streets, among the dim live-oaks and the shining magnolias, our doubting hearts lifted, and we said: “Yes, yes, it is all true! This is St. Augustine as advertised: the air, the sky, the wooden architecture of the 1870’s and ’80’s, when St. Augustine flourished most, and the memory of that dear Constance Fenimore Woolson, who worshiped Florida past all Italy, was still sweet in our literature. Yes, it is all incredibly true!” Then, as we made our way to Mr. Hastings’s beautiful masterpieces, the hotels Ponce de Leon and Alcazar, and took refuge in the Neo-Andalusian of the simpler hostelry from the Belated American of those obsolescent cottages, we gathered our faith and courage more and more about us, and gave ourselves to that charm of the place which has not yet failed us.

The charm is very complex, as a true charm always is, but the place is very simple, as a place which has taken time to grow always is. It is especially so if the place, like St. Augustine, has had its period of waning as well as waxing, and has gently lapsed from its climax. The heydey of its prosperity was in the years between the 1870’s and ’80’s, when St. Augustine promised to be lastingly, as it was most fitly, the winter resort for the whole sneezing and coughing North. Then the Great Freeze blasted the oranges and hopes of all Upper Florida; then California flowered and fruited ahead; then the summer shores of Palm Beach and Miami took the primacy from California, and Florida was again the desire of our winter travel and sojourn, with a glory of motoring and dancing such as Florida never knew before, or can ever know, at St. Augustine. But the little city continued the metropolis of the mind and heart for such as did not care to shine with the luster of money; and those beautiful hotels remained without rivalry from the vast wooden caravansaries of the more tropical resorts, and still remain holding down their quarter of the local topography.

It is better, though, to own at once that the charm of St. Augustine derives nothing from any thing like grandeur in the domestic architecture of the past. In the Spanish city there were probably no dwellings of such stateliness as the three or four mansions of our own Colonial classic, which with their groves and gardens redeem the American town from the reproach of those deplorable ’seventies and ’eighties, when our eclectic architecture tried its ’prentice hand on so many of the cottages. The Spaniards had built themselves unassuming houses of coquina, always flush upon the sidewalks, and painted their coating of stucco in the buffs and blues and pinks of the Latin taste; and their dwellings never had the proportion of palaces, if one may imagine them from the few that remain. But when you leave Mr. Hastings’s hotels, and keep along King Street eastward on the town plan, you are almost at once in the Plaza, which is the heart of every Spanish town, and which begins here with the fountained and palmettoed oblong inclosing what was once the Spanish governor’s palace, or so said to be. It is now the American post-office and custom-house, but is inalienably dignified and venerable, with some galleried façades of the same period on one side, and a compendious reach of cheerful shops on the other. These are on King Street, and you must cross St. George Street (stretching crookedly northward with shops and hotels to the old city gate, and southward with embowered dwellings of divers architectural effects and intentions) before you are again at the Plaza, holding the same eastward course to the shining bay, and to the long bridge built on piers of palmetto logs after the fashion invented at York Harbor in Maine and followed in the Long Bridge at Boston. But the bridge from St. Augustine to Anastasia Island is longer than any other of its kind, even that over the Piscataqua at Portsmouth which it also excels in the enormity of its tolls, as you shall find when you cross it to the snow-white billowing of the low northward sand-dunes and the thick gloom of the cedar and live-oak woods rising from the water to the southward in an illusion of uplands. All round the city where there are not stretches of palmetto scrub and pine woods, there is the far sweep of the salt-savannahs, with reed like grasses growing tall, and keeping their Spanish brown from November till March, and then slowly turning green, as it were insensibly, almost invisibly, after the use of vegetation in the South. In the waters around, hidden in the deeps or bristling from the shallows, grow the exhaustless ranks of the little oysters, which before the white man came to know their deliciousness left their shells by the million tons. These are still used in the construction of the beautiful shell roads of the country round, now replaced in the town by the harsh brick pavements which the municipality is so proud of and which really hold down the dust as the shells could not.

GENERAL XIMENES'S HOUSE

It is to be said in the praise of the municipality that it keeps these pavements swept blamelessly clean; and by night you may hear the negroes sweeping, doubly darkling over their surface, and softly gossiping together. Theirs are not the only black voices you hear, for their casual race seems to have no more stated hours for sleeping than for eating. Their mellow murmurs, especially when the nights are warm, rise in what seems perpetual joking, as if from their humorous pleasure at being alive together in the same amusing world; and if you have no worse conscience than the talkers, their voices will lull you again to the slumbers they have broken. It is as if a swarm of blackbirds, carrying news of the spring northward, had swept chuckling through

SILHOUETTE OF THE CITY

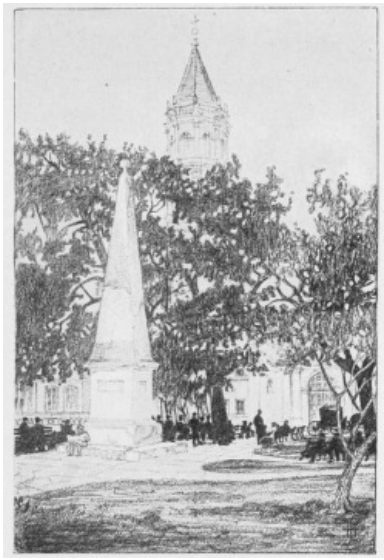
the trees and fluttered the fans of the palms and the leaves of the magnolias with such comment in their course as would naturally occur to blackbirds.

By day these kindly colored folk did not seem to superabound as they do in Charleston, but this may have been because in the tourist season they are really outnumbered by the whites in St. Augustine. They have their own scattering quarters which they are not strictly kept to; they are segregated, but not concentrated, though their souls are saved in separate churches, and their minds informed in separate schools. They even have their own picture-theaters, but they are softly insinuated through the white population in all subordinate service, and I never knew the slightest unkindness of word or deed offered them. If there were any you would not know it from them; by day, at least, they are silent, and they seem always inoffensive, though very independent. You mostly know them as the drivers of the wood-colored surreys which still anticipate the elsewhere universal taxicabs, and as the disseminators of more or less unreliable information. They do not mean to deceive the stranger, and their own ignorance may have been first abused. As I heard them passing our gate in St. George Street (where we dwelt in the winter of our second sojourn at St. Augustine), and pointing out the objects of interest, I could have wished to share in both the illusion and delusion. Their race apparently rested content in its lowly employs, with seldom the hope or endeavor for higher things. In some cases which seemed few, it sometimes became propertied, and owned its usually decrepit cabins in and beyond the suburbs; but it was said that if any housing improved, and put on an air of prosperity it was not well regarded. This may have been the excuse of racial unthrift, and I have to urge, to the contrary the signal instance of a colored man living in a very comfortable house of his own in his own grounds, without molestation from any lowest or spitefullest white witness of his condition. He paid what seemed heavy interest to me, and taxes which seemed heavy to him, under the municipal government of St. Augustine which has lately changed to the commission form (a favorite experiment in the South as well as the West) without abatement of the rates, which remain of metropolitan proportions.

The colored people are by far for the most part entirely black, to the credit of both races, since intermarriage is abhorred both by the laws and customs, and they are of the prevailing plainness of their race. On the other hand, one might go very far and wide elsewhere without seeing so much outright beauty among the whites, and especially in the sex whose business it is to be beautiful, as in St. Augustine. Age is no handsomer there than in other places, and now and then country folks of the cadaverous cracker type appeared with the produce of their sandy fields or groves; but the beauty and grace of the young girls of city

birth was extraordinarily great. Perhaps it was from my lifelong fondness for the Spanish that I chose to think these divine creatures, so, slimly shaped and darkly fair, were ol the Spanish race which for three hundred years ruled or misruled in St. Augustine. There was the like fineness in some of the men's faces which earned later into life than in the women's; but the Spaniards have left so little trace otherwise in the city, that they were probably those insular Spanish, the Minorcans, whose touching story is a minor strain in the romance of the city's life.

In all public places the American girl prevailed in the excess of fashion which it is her prerogative to exploit everywhere, with the helpless American father fettered to her high-heeled, sharp-toed little shoes, and the American mother distractedly struggling to keep up with her. This sovereign of our society did not appear very early in the winter, or indeed till after the turn of the year, when with a roar of cannon and a flutter of Hags (the Spanish colors romantically pre-eminent) the gates of the great Ponce de Leon Hotel were thrown open and the season was officially proclaimed. By that time the Alcazar was pretty well filled in lounge and *patio* by such fashion as had not waited so long as at the Ponce de Leon to come up from Palm Beach, or perhaps not even been there, or wished to be; these things are mysteries which one had better leave to the pictures and the letter-press of the Sunday editions. I myself was happiest in the looks of those hoarders and roomers who abounded in the Plaza from the small hotels and lodging-houses and intimidated my meek spirit less than the guests of the two great hotels which are not quite so much the last word in architecture as in fashion. They are the syllabling of the architect who won the commission for them while yet a student in the *École des Beaux Arts*, and pronounced it in accents which, though still so distinctive, are now a little archaic. People now do not want that series of drawing and dining-rooms which open from the inner *patio* of the Ponce de Leon; and if they did, they would not have the form fitly to inhabit them; their short skirts and their lounge-coats are not for such gracious interiors, but rather for the golf-links.



THE PLAZA

One heard of teas in the afternoons and of balls at night which filled these rooms, but, as I have owned, I am afraid of the great world, and am so eager to despise the pride of life when I think I see it that I make myself unhappy in the vision, and I would rather invite the reader to fly with me to the more congenial society of the Plaza. I will not even attempt to speak of the balls at the Ponce de Leon from the exclusion, too voluntary to know that it might have been involuntary, which I suffered. Any one could share the pleasure of the tango-teas in the most fashionable restaurants by simply coming to them and either dancing them or drinking them. The dancing was actually the affair of young couples who seemed to stray in from the street, and

AN ANCIENT DOORWAY

circled round between the tables in those rhythmical embraces of the dance to the harsh clatter of the band and the applause of those who preferred the tea form of tango. It was very strange, and a little periculous-looking, but practically it came to no more harm than the waltz did in its day when it alarmed the delicacy of Byron's muse a hundred years ago. Besides these tango-teas there were street dances at night promised by local associations, but mostly defeated by cold snaps from the North or West, which seized them as it were unawares, after the street had been roped off, and hung with lanterns, or flooded with moonlight. Where you expected a gay masquerade what you got was a couple or two in citizen's dress performing to the music of what sounded like a German band, but may have been German-American. Cordova Street was the favorite scene of such hilarities, but there are many other St. Augustine streets named after Spanish cities or provinces which I liked to walk through or drive through merely because they were called Saragossa, or Granada, or Barcelona, or Malaga, or the like, and brought their namesakes endearingly to mind.

One year I recall, however, when the kinder night caressed the scene with the tenderness of summer, and glowed upon the same southward space of Cordova Street where with the first hour of dusk the feet of the dancers began to whisper on the sanded asphalt. The new moon, with upward-tilted horns, swam in the blue above the palms of the Alcazar gardens and sank into its depths while the dance thickened in the mystical pace of the one-step and the music throbbed with the monotony of the barbaric time. It was such a scene as we might have looked down upon from some balcony in medieval Florence, where the youth of the city danced from street to street, and the children were allowed up to look on till all hours, as they were now in St. Augustine.

In St. Augustine the shops and theaters are open on Sunday, as in any continental European town, but the same may be said of the churches, which are abundantly frequented. The favorite dissipation of the local youth was apparently the ice-cream served at small tables in the drug-stores, where with the bane the antidote could be promptly supplied; but I should say, or almost say, that the favorite dissipation of the aliens of every age was the sail to the nearer and farther North Beaches. This could be afforded at twenty-five cents, which paid the sail both ways, and the transit of the sandy stretch of the island to the ocean shore in a horse-car drawn by a mule hitched at the side of the car, but did not include the roast oysters at the restaurants. If you wish to lose yourself in the sandy jungles of Anastasia Island you may cross by trolley-car on a pro rata payment of that supremely extortionate toll which I have already lamented. But I hope you do not wish to cross as yet, but will be willing to keep with me along the bay-front, either way you like, past some minor hotels and pleasant dwellings southward and the ruins of old Spanish houses and dwellings northward, when suddenly the fort of San Marco, now misnamed Marion, blocks your way with its mass, darkly but not gloomily Spanish, and incomparably monumental.

It is the most perfect example of the Vauban ideal of military architecture anywhere remaining; yet neither for this, nor for anything else are you to leave the Plaza, which is the heart of St. Augustine, until you have exhausted all the emotions it can impart. They are not many, and for me the chiefest of them came from my affectionate interest in those minor hotel guests and roomers who seemed to resort there much more in the March of last year than of this. Then they arrived, with their home-town papers (bought of the blind newsman at the corner of the post-office) and sat, rows upon rows of them, on the benches converging upon the stand where a very admirable band of musicians, claiming to be Venetian, but upon confidential approach owning themselves Neapolitan, seemed to play day-long and night-long while my home-towners exchanged personal histories, and declared their opinions of the climate and the weather of St. Augustine.

A BIT OF OLD ST. AUGUSTINE

With the wind in the right quarter, and the sun in a forenoon sky either entirely blue, or a soft blend of white clouds melting in spaces of azure, the play of light through the palmetto and cedar tops on the facade of the cathedral across the street or on the curves of the triune belfry beside it, left nothing to be asked of the climate or weather. But both are subject to strange vicissitudes, and especially from melting warmth to cold of the ice-brook's temper. You should especially beware of the wind that blows with soft insistence from the southeast till the first thing you know it has got round you, as if

THE CITY GATES

morally, and holds you in the clutch of a cold snap, incredibly prophesied from the northwest. The Floridian winter, which is not a season, but merely an incident of the year-long summer of the latitude, seldom comes from New York or Boston, but arrives from Chicago by way of Chattanooga, and its affiliations are with the Middle West, as most of its visitors are. Sometimes it comes like a thief in the night, and twice it has happened with me to be resting on one of the home-towners' benches in the Plaza, and with head thrown back to be admiring the mildest of full moons, and then before morning to hear the rush and trample of a sudden shower on my roof and to wake in the morning eager for the fire of live-oak logs on my hearth.

This was so in the gentle January of one of my sojourns, and in either of the two Marches I have known for the maddest months of the St. Augustine winter. They say that December is commonly mild, as with the resignation of the declining year, and that February is not so very bad, but I search my lexicon in vain for a good word to say of March, though by then the mocking-birds have long been in full chorus and are making believe that all the songsters of the northing spring are lingering with us. I am sorry to say that our noisy, big, vulgar robin was never among these, but in compensation there was now and then audibly a blue-jay, whether in its authentic note, or the mocking-bird's thin reproduction, and welcomer still was the simulated fluting of the red-bird, sweet as if it came from the Middle-Western woods of my boyhood. With these sylvan voices the hymning of the nuns joined from their school-garden across the way, and the far-floating call of the crows from the upper blue. Their call was never the harsh cawing of our Northern crows, but something more like the colloquies of the English rooks among their "immemorial elms." As the January and February days follow one another in an almost unbroken succession of sunny days one is apt to see turkey-buzzards that spread their wider wings among the crows. A trio of them, I remember, liked to perch on the cupola of a neighboring house, where they seemed in the early morning to be discussing the business of the coming day, and consulting upon matters of grave importance, but were probably settling some question of recently discovered carrion. I liked best to have them far aloof, and I particular fancy for the way their pinions bent thinly upward at the edge.

If the reader is still, as I hope, in the Plaza with me, I would have him leave our places on the Mid-Western benching, and come and lean over the rail which keeps the dogs and boys from throwing themselves to the alligator in his pool there, where he lies stiller than the stone of his bath. In some moment when the water is coldest he rises to the sun and basks motionless and soundless on the stone curbing, but no one ever saw him unlid those loathly eyes of his, or stir those antediluvian limbs. Ever, do I say? This is wrong. I myself have seen the monster raise himself on his hideous arms and legs and, "being wrought upon in the extreme" by his intolerable prescience of a change in the weather, lift his head and roar—roar as the jungled lion roars, or as the bull that sees his rival cross the meadow where he ranges in challenge to mortal combat. Nothing in nature has more surprised me, and the effect with my fellow home-towners was the same; they came running from, the benches—men, women, and children—and hung upon the alligator's fence and wondered and worshiped like so many idolaters of some serpent of Old Nile, till his bellow subsided into a hoarse bleat, and then a long sigh that shook the disgusting folds of his throat into silence.

Several times already in this study of the Plaza I have tried to mention the ivied Gothic of the Episcopal church which faces the southwestern corner, and then the galleried upper stories of the line of shops stretching eastward forming a picturesque recall of the St. Augustine which was once so much more all galleries than the ancient city now is. But I could not somehow leave the intersecting paths and the flower-beds beside them, or that gentle little Canovan figure with ankles crossed and wrists on hips which discreetly invites from its pedestal the home-towner unfolding his paper as he advances to place himself with his back to the sun on a favorite bench. Still less could I leave the somewhat plain, not to say severe, obelisk near the fountain which celebrates in stately inscriprional Spanish the promulgation of the constitution of 1812. Which king of the several constitution-giving sovereigns of Spain it was who gave that charter of the national liberties I do not know or much care to know. The charm, the provincial-patriotic charm of the obelisk remains, as it remains with every crumbling ruin of the city which the Spanish colonists builded and as you feel it at many points on the swerving, rather than curving, narrow ways between St. George Street and the bay-front. I here the wooden balconies droop from the drooping wall of time-stained coquina; the doors and windows open flush upon the sidewalks; the little gardens cherish a few onions and heads of lettuce; the dooryard trees support themselves in the friendly angles and ripen, slowly ripen their plums, their peaches, their guavas, their figs, and such other fruits as love a sunny exposure in literature.

THE SPANISH FORT

These little sympathetic lanes continue to King Street, but seldom cross it. There at the end of the Plaza, where the old Spanish market-house consents to the modern legend of having been a slave-mart, other kind avenues take up the tale and tell it, mostly in the terms of the gentle Charlotte Street, till they bring you almost suddenly upon the great fortress of San Marco set impregnable across your path. There, if it could have spoken, San Marco might well have forbidden the ravage of the flames which have consumed large spaces of the Spanish houses on the bay-front, and left only the crumbling coquina walls and arches and the scorched palmettoes to attest the tragedy of their destruction; but it is not till you pass San Marco that you come upon the means of enforcing such a mandate—not till you come in fact to the city water-works where the splendid up-gush from the deeply subterranean springs diffuses their odor through the air. Many people—perhaps most—do not like this odor, and few if any like the taste of the water, unless they have been inured to the offensive virtues of the ferruginous and sulphurous springs of Germany. It is not healing like these, but physicians say you may safely drink it if you can stand it; and to the right, before you reach the water-works, you may visit the Fountain of Youth which it seems an error to suppose Ponce de Leon did not discover when he came to Florida in 1513, for he left the fountain behind him there with the date in a pattern of stone near the source. In fact he left two Fountains of Youth at St. Augustine, but the one which was to the westward of the actual fountain was closed by the Board of Health as unhygienic. For a reasonable sum, however, you may drink of the remaining spring, and if it does not rejuvenate you it will scarcely disappoint you, unless you have expected the impossible of it, or even the credible. This remaining Fountain of Youth may well be left behind in the realm of fancy, and the atmosphere of fable which so richly invests it, for a return to the great fortress which holds down more history than any other such edifice on our continent. Not even the citadel at Quebec outrivals it for the events which have elapsed in its time, for it has stood invulnerable during the two hundred and fifty years since its foundations were powerfully laid beside the wave that washes its base.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]

A Confession of St. Augustine

BY W. D. HOWELLS

PART II

THOUGH it was in 1513 that Ponce de Leon came sailing from Puerto Rico to find the waters of youth, it was not till 1565 that the terrible, the cruel (yet no more responsibly cruel or terrible than a tiger) Pedro Menendez de Aviles came in sight of those sands, and fell upon the weak-minded, fever-wasted Huguenots whom he found in possession and captured and slaughtered these heretics, and put Spain and God in keeping of their own again. The tale need hardly be repeated here; once for all the pious, pitiless Pedro has told it for himself to his king, the pious, pitiless Philip, in a letter found among the colonial archives at Seville and included among other curious documents in *The Unknown History of Our Country*, as it is entitled by the lady of St. Augustine who compiled it. The Lutherans, as Menendez, like all the Spaniards of his time, called the Huguenots, were by the laws and usage of the time illegally there, and it was his duty as a loyal subject and a good Christian to destroy them. He was much concerned besides in saving the souls of the savages from these Lutherans who had the gift of insinuating affection for themselves among the Indians along with their heretical instruction.

There is something wonderful in the moral security of the murderer's account of his crime, which was not a private or personal murder so much as a political act duly avenged on the Spaniards by the French, when their turn came. For the present the French were miserably officered; they were spent by hunger and sickness; the winds and waves were leagued with the Spaniards against them; and they gave themselves up to Menendez, as he had fairly stipulated, without any promise of mercy. Then he took them out from their comrades' sight by tens till he had put them all to death, except a few who proved to be of the true faith just in time, and other few who were such excellent artificers that their skill could not be spared by the captors who spared their lives. There is a touch in the fashion of their taking off by Menendez worthy of an hidalgo who was born in Granada and who knew how a gentleman should behave in such a matter. He had their hands bound, and led them aside, and then, to spare their feelings, he had them stabbed in the back.

There was bloodshed of this sort or that pretty well everywhere along these white sands, but death had so long died out of the dead that one day when we motored down Anastasia Island to a point where there had been a battle, we lunched on the table stretched under the trees of a pleasant farm, and used a half-petrified skull to keep down our Japanese paper table-spread without molestation from its terrible memories. It does not sound very pleasant, but we were no more aware of the petrifaction's human quality than it was of ours,

and in the farm-yard near by the peach-trees kept on with their leisurely blossoming as if there had never been slaughter of French or Spaniards in the shade where we ate our sandwiches with the sweet, small oysters from the shore, and drained our thermos-bottles of their coffee. In fact, after the Spaniards were with comparatively little wanton bloodshed secure in their hold of Florida, life at St. Augustine went on in the paternal terms which the obedient children of their fatherly kings found kindly enough. During those three hundred years, one Philip followed another from the Second till the Fourth, and St. Augustine drowsed under their rule till some successor of them ceded it to the British in exchange for Cuba, which the British had somehow (it does not matter how) come by. Meanwhile, as the papers from the Sevillian archives testify, the bond between the prince and his far-off subjects was close if not tender. When any of them was in trouble he wrote to the king; a priest who fancied himself wronged in his duties or privileges wrote; the families of old soldiers wrote, dunning for their pensions; any one who had a grievance against any other, or a pull of his own, wrote to the king. Sometimes the king wrote back, or seemed to write, for perhaps he did not personally read all those letters. When, in due course, his faithful lieges began to build him that beautiful fort of San Marco they wrote so pressingly and constantly for money that the kings made its cost their joke. One Philip said he thought they must have now got it so high that he ought to see its bastions from Madrid; another asked if they were making its curtains of solid silver.

By that time, from one cause or another, the royal funds had begun to run low; the English buccaneers had long since learned to tap them at their sources in the galleons bringing the gold and silver ingots up the Spanish Main from South America. When the authorities of St. Augustine had got the lofty bastions of San Marco finally up and the solid-silver curtains down, General Oglethorpe, who had meanwhile settled Georgia, marched a force of Englishmen through the forests and morasses to Anastasia and sat down before the stronghold, and began to bombard it. But in their season there are clouds of mosquitoes and myriads of sand-flies in that island and they bit his sick and homesick soldiers fearfully. Still he held on, and he might have reduced the stronghold and the starving population of three thousand civilian refugees within its walls if one day a relief of Spanish ships had not come sailing up from Havana. Then the British general struck his tents and led his bitten and baffled forces home through the forests and morasses.

San Marco has never been attacked since, for when our revolution broke out, Florida did not join the other colonies in their revolt against the British, who remained peaceably enough in possession till they ceded the province back to Spain. Then the old city resumed its slumbers in her keeping, till Spain in her turn ceded Florida, with its Seminole War, to the United States, when the name of the fort was changed, fatuously enough, from San Marco to Fort Marion, in honor of a hero whose side Florida had not taken in our revolt. It is devoted now mainly to rousing and allaying the curiosity of the swarming tourists who haunt its medieval fastnesses, and for the first time in their lives realize what a past they had no part in was like. In this way it serves the best possible use, but otherwise it is employed as the scene of rehearsals for the more populous events of the picture-plays. On a single occasion last year a company of three hundred combatants—white and black, men, women, and children, hired overnight for the purpose—thronged the noble place and repelled each other in an invasion by the Japanese, with a constant explosion of old-fashioned musketry which sounded like the detonations of the unmuffled motors of a fleet of such boats as infest all our inland or coastwise waters. These, no longer in the force of former years, make themselves heard over the still waters of the bay at St. Augustine any especially fine evening, when they madden the echoes with their infernal racketing. No longer as in their former years, I say, but they are still in such force as to keep frightened away the sail-boats which used to flock there, but now linger only in a sad two or three. Otherwise the bay is not crowded with any sort of craft: a few yachts of houseboat model; the little steamers which ply between St. Augustine and Daytona, the fishing craft which bring the inexhaustible oysters and their multifarious finny kindred to the excellent fish-market; and, on stated days, the great, swelling stern-wheel steamboat arriving from Jacksonville as from the Western rivers of sixty years ago formed the pleasure and business of the port; though I must not forget the two gasolene packets running to the North beaches, at hours which it took them the whole of January to ascertain and specify.

Otherwise the port offered a good reproduction of the two centuries of calm which it must have enjoyed during the Spanish rule; to be sure there was now the rattling of the trolley-car over the extortionate toll-bridge to the island which could not have been heard then, or even imagined. I like to fancy that time as one of entire peacefulness for all not of the New Religion who after the time of the devout Menendez are scarcely imaginable there. The spirit of the time lingers yet in a few half-dozen old coquina houses standing flush upon the streets. One of them stood next to our own, covered, roof and wall, with ivy and with roses and yellow bignonia flowers, where Prince Murat, the Bonapartist heir of the Neapolitan throne, lived and died in a long, unmolested exile. We found it a charmingly simple interior, much like that of the little house so lately owned and occupied by a gentle, elderly Spanish lady who received us like friends upon fit introduction, but had to keep her street door locked against the tourists apt to make themselves at home by walking in without ceremony. The door was overhung by a true Spanish balcony, and behind the house reposed an old garden of trees and flowers and vegetables, with the only staircase of the house climbing the outer wall from it. The gentle lady was proud of the age of her house, which she held as great as that of the oldest house in St. Augustine in the same street, or even greater. There is a rivalry between oldest houses in St. Augustine, but after making friends with her we would admit no competition. We always looked for her in the quaint garden as we passed, and we were always hoping to go into it again, when one day suddenly, as such things seem to come to one in St. Augustine, we heard that she was dead of pneumonia. By chance also we saw her funeral starting from the cathedral, and then, keeping our own course, we fell in behind the sad train by another chance, and followed till it left us to keep its way to the arid and sandy new cemetery of her church.

The old Spanish cemetery, now disused, lies far away on the edge of the marshes to the northwest, where it was sweet one morning to find it basking in the sun, under its wilding cedars, in the keeping of the cows which made it their pasturage. When I wandered a little way among its forgotten and neglected graves, I found no name Spanisher than Burns on one of the stones. There might have been Spanisher names; I only say I did not happen on them then, though later, following the wandering cowpaths, I did find such a name as, say, Lopez. But at the worst the old Spanish cemetery is not so all misnamed as the old Huguenot burial-ground, where no Huguenot was ever buried, and where you cannot read a solitary name of French accent or

denomination. The Old Religion, as distinguished from the New Religion which the Huguenots professed, is the faith which now perhaps not unfitly prevails in St. Augustine, but there is a great variety in the Protestant faiths, let alone that difference of white and black which is of such marked emphasis that I do not suppose any one could get to heaven from a church where he was not properly segregated. The colored churches, divided from the white, are again divided by such a nice distinction, for example, as Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal. Many of the colored people, however, are broadly Roman Catholic, but they also have their own churches apart from the white.

When the king of Spain ceded Florida to the king of England, late in the eighteenth century, the Spanish inhabitants of St. Augustine largely, if not mostly, went away to Cuba, but their religion continued in the primacy which it still enjoys. The cathedral fronting the Plaza from the north is not the cathedral of former days, but a dignified reproduction of the cathedral devoured by the flames which in St. Augustine seem to have a peculiar appetite for the older edifices. One steps into it from the twentieth century and finds oneself in the serious silence which is the same in all the temples of that faith, and which one might almost persuade oneself was a religious emotion and not the esthetic impression it really is. It makes one wish for the moment that one were of the Old Religion, and this was the effect with me when I woke in the morning and heard the nuns' sweet voices rising in their matins over the gardens of the girls' school across the way from us. It was a privilege to dwell in the sound and sight of that place, and one felt something of an unmerited consecration from it; when one met two of those kind sisters, who always came and went in twos, one gladly stepped from the narrow footway of St. George Street, and gave way to them with a sense of unmerited blessing from the sight of them. The figure of St. Joseph looked down, at first glance rather apparitionally, from an upper window across the flowers, and seemed to bless them in the benediction not withheld from the shrill hilarity of the girl children and the undergraduates romping at their noonday games in the open galleries. One night we went to a dramatic performance in the school given by a sisterhood of young people from the outside under the nuns' auspices, with blameless dances and instructive mythological tableaux. When we would not wait for the play which was to follow these we were stayed by one of the girl pupils and entreated to remain; the play was going to be the best thing of the whole evening; and now I am sorry we did not remain.

Such spare incidents were the most salient events of our sojourn, which I could easily pretend was full of much more startling experiences. St. Augustine is indeed the setting of almost any most dramatic fact, as the companies of movie-players, rehearsing their pantomimes everywhere, so recurrently testified. No week passed without the encounter of these genial fellow-creatures dismounting from motors at this picturesque point or that, or delaying in them to darken an eye, or redden a lip or cheek, or pull a bodice into shape, before alighting to take part in the drama. I talk as if there were no men in these affairs, but there were plenty, preferably villains, like brigands or smugglers or savages, with consoling cowboys or American cavalrymen for the rescue of ladies in extremity. Seeing the films so much in formation, we naturally went a great deal to see them ultimated in the movie-theaters, where we found them nearly all bad. In this I do not suppose that they differed from the movie-drama elsewhere, or that they were more unfailingly worthless. They were less offensive as they were more romantic; when they tried to be realistic they illustrated the life of crime in the East, and of violence in the West. There was very little comedy, but one night, in the representation of a medieval action, an involuntary stroke of burlesque varied the poetry of the love interest when the mechanical piano, which had been set to the music of the tango, continued that deplorable strain while the funeral of a nun slowly paced through the garden of the convent to the chapel. The general vulgarity and worse seemed the more pity because the theaters were always well filled not only with prouder visitors from the great hotels, and the friendly roomers from everywhere, but with nice-looking townspeople, who had brought their children with them when they had not let them come alone.

The children seemed about at most hours of their parents' waking, and, as in Italy and Spain, one saw little ones of tender age sharing their pleasures of the public places. Very small boys and girls played at night in the paths of the Plaza, or hung upon the railing of the alligator's bath-tub, and admired his secular repose; now and then one fell asleep at its mother's knee, and I thought the whole usage homelike and kindly, however not perfectly wise. It was at least part of the native life, which the tourist lite so much overran; and yet that tourist life was genial, too. It went and came in conversible enjoyment of the place, from its various lodgings and from the delicatessen shops where it inexpensively fed. As the season advanced it thickened upon the town, and the dwellers up and down the more convenient streets were adventurously besought to share their houses with the roomers. We ourselves were not exempt from their entreaties, and I do not yet quite know how we escaped having one mother in Israel for a paying guest; she sat down at her own suggestion to argue the matter with us, and I thought really she had much of the logic on her side. Possibly she prolonged her argument because she liked so much the rich glow from the mass of the live-oak logs burning on our hearth, and I did not blame her; rather do I blame myself, and shall always blame, for not asking in to that genial warmth the little frail old dame who arrived one cold day on our veranda to offer her pathetically humble stock of needles and pins for our purchase. I then thought it enough to buy a quarter's worth of pins, and did not think, insensate that I was, to ask her indoors to warm herself at our fire. She was from Michigan, she said, and that Florida day must have been mockingly bitter to her. She faded into the afternoon chill, and left me, when I realized it, to suffer for my sin of omission with vain thoughts of pursuing her, and bringing her back and offering her tea and toast and whatever instant refreshments I could imagine.

While I am about owning this unavailing regret, I may as well remember how I one day bought a wagon-load of fat pine from a thin little old woman, who proved, on the testimony of our colored maid, a widow trying to work the bit of farm her husband's death had left her, and whom I ought to have bought a load of fat pine from every day, but I did not think to order even another load, and so never saw her again. This also lies heavy on my soul, but I thank Heaven we bought all the tumblers of delicious guava jelly which a little neighbor girl offered us; and since we did this I wish she had seemed needier than she probably was. Not many people came to us with things to sell, but we soon began getting boxes of delicious strawberries from the farm-wife whom once we found working in her own field, and we never ceased buying them as long as they lasted. It was a quaint place, of wooden Gothic, holding its own against age, and charming the air with an effect of personal history. She led us over it, and invited us to tell any one who asked that it was to let furnished, as I now tell the reader. A lady not otherwise of our acquaintance accompanied us on her own

incentive, as by mere force of habit, and said she always liked to visit that house, it was so picturesque.

Very little of the country life showed itself about the town, and when it did it was mostly colored; there was one white orange-farmer who came at first with his fruit, and then, on our question of the sweetness of his tangerines, promptly ceased to come. But there is a famous orange grove northward of the city where the tangerines are better, and you may be shown on a ladder plucking them from the tree, if you are of a mind to be so photographed. It is perhaps a little too conscious, but the orchard is not the less sincere for that, and you may see there the preparation which the orange-growers of northern Florida have provided against frost ever since the Great Freeze: pots and pans of combustibles, to make a heavy smudge and blanket the fruit against the inclemency of the skies. When the spring began to thicken in leaf and blossom upon our vernal world, the perfume of the orange flowers struck through the air a quarter of a mile off and involved us in its dense sweetness as we drove by on our often way “Round the Horn.” As is well known, the orange-trees are always flowering and fruiting together, but it may not be so well known that in St. Augustine they have infected the peach-trees with their habit. When we arrived the first week of January these were already trying the temperature with a bud here and there, and when we left in the second week of April, they were still tentatively blowing, as the New England country folks say, while their earlier ventures were rewarded with half-grown peaches. There was never that passionate flush of bloom which makes the peach-tree a thing of unspeakable beauty at the North; with the whole season from Christmas to Easter for its work, it felt no hurry here. It was so with most other fruits and flowers, especially with the nondescript fruit called a loquat in Bermuda, and in St. Augustine a Japanese plum, which began with no perceptible flower, and slowly yellowed and mellowed to the hand of predatory boyhood, though that might have had it for the asking in any dooryard. In the first days of April the mulberries were black enough to be eaten by the black boys. We made no account of roses and violets; but the poinsettia seemed to merit attention by keeping its fire-red spikes on till they dropped at the coming of spring, and left the bougainvillea to take up the tale.

That famous orange orchard which we must not leave behind yet, is admirable for the avenues first of palms, and then of live-oaks which form its approach; the oaks stretch their writhing limbs across the driveway, and put a still weirder disposition on from their hearsing with long plumes of Spanish moss, in perhaps the least endearing appeal of nature to human nature. Half an acre from the stooping trunks the branches reach far out as in some strife of “dragons of the prime,” hairy with the hideous gray of the parasite, which waves funerally in the air. It is said to be finally the death of the tree, but there is here and there one which escapes its throttling grip, and especially we knew one which in a neglected garden spread itself abroad over half an acre of ground. Always it was a pleasure to drive by that vast oak, as it was a pleasure to drive under the oaks which border the long Avenue San Marco on the way to the road Round the Horn. Last year it seemed to have been ravaged by some sort of insect, but it was putting out its gray-green leaves anew, with the water-oak in young verdure bulking freshly and refreshingly beside it.

The drive Round the Horn is the most characteristic of the drives about St. Augustine, and is more comprehensive of the general interest than any other. The bridge which you presently cross gives one of the fairest prospects of the city, with its Andalusian towers and roofs, and then you are on the way back to them, by a shell road winding through the reaches and expanses of palmetto scrub, among the stems of the rather spindling pines. The scrub is the wonder and the terror of the local landscape, and, so far as I know, the whole Floridian landscape. Of all the vegetable enemies of man it seems the most inexorable. You may cut it, or burn its fans down to the roots; it bides its time, and after a brief season of sparse grass, which the cows eat in default of other herbage, the scrub renews its hold upon the nether regions, and must be dug up, fiber by fiber, before the meager soil can be freed from it for such crops as will grow in it. More crops will grow in what looks like mere sand than you would imagine, or the Northern farmer or gardener could hope to harvest from it. If you transplant the young trees from among the scrub, they willingly flourish, when encouraged with a little water, into columnar palmettoes, such as make the promise of a noble avenue on the drive to the beautiful woodland called Lewis’s Point, after a philanthropist whose public and private beneficences at St. Augustine form a Tolstoyan romance. But this is not the place to tell the story which, as your colored driver murmurs it, lends its poetry to your course through the winding ways of the natural park, with their outlooks upon the still waters of the bays and bayous around. You need not otherwise believe all that your driver says, especially all he says of the serpents which frequent these groves and climb the vines of the scuppernong to share its fruit with the colored boys competing for the grapes. Like these boys, the snake which loves the fruit most is black, and sometimes in the imagination of the driver is of as lofty reach as the vine itself.

Candor obliges me to say that although we saw scuppernong vines in abundance, we never saw any snakes on them, black or of any other color; but once in driving home from the Point in the cool of a very cool evening we saw a captive rattlesnake held in leash by the man who had caught it. The loathly worm was quite torpid from the cold, and lay a gray, clayey length that showed the whole pattern of its checkered design, with its rattles a full yard away from its deadly fangs. We did not stay to ask how or where it had been taken, but hurried by through the early dusk which the Southern twilight had suddenly lapsed into after our visit to the vineyard where a German family makes a “fine, fruity old port” from the berries of the scuppernong. These grow, anomalously enough, the size of small plums, in loose clusters of three or four, and are of the flavor of our Concord grapes, but do not transport so well as the wine, and probably would not ripen in the North. The name had always a charm for me from its musical enumeration in that pleasant rhyme of Longfellow’s renowning our Catawba beyond all other native, and some alien vintages; and I now satisfied my wish to see the scuppernong growing on some spreading trellises which it roofed. But it has never the soft insinuation of vines better known to literature, and before the leaves come to hide them in the spring, it is covered with spiky twigs instead of the delicate, clinging tendrils of other grapes. The spreading trellises here were of no great spread, and were presently lost in an orchard of oranges and other fruit trees, all ordered with a neatness very alien to the sloven farming of the country about, but much in keeping with the young Bavarian sisters, with their long braids and smooth masses of dark hair, who came out to show us the place. They came out of a new-built house of Northern pattern—first to save us from the misgivings of their dogs; and last—their widowed mother and older sister being in town—the capable little women led us to the barn where the bottles and barrels of the scuppernong were stored. When I proposed to buy a bottle of the wine, they wished me to taste a glass of it that I might test its quality; and they even allowed our colored

driver (a very mildly coffee-colored driver) to join in the test, so that he was able to add his voice in favor of the vintage from a whole tumblerful.

The drive from the farm through the forest solitude back to the highway was haunted by the sad or savage black faces starting up before us as in the woodland road, and was not cheered by the lamps in the windows of the moldering hamlet of Moultrie. Ruin seemed to have grown upon the place since we had seen it an hour before, and a decay at once eerie and ramshackle invested the forsaken villa on rising ground beyond the estuary where the little oysters mustered their serried ranks in the ebb-tide of the muddy flats. This villa could never have been very impressive itself, but the massive stone posts of the gateways approaching it were of even undue grandeur; otherwise the unpainted wood of the local architecture, which had never known dignity nor beauty, was of that repulsive forlornness which seems characteristic of the Southern farm or village house in its decay. Yet if the ground has once been cleared of all that man has builded for the shelter of his love or pride, there is sometimes a charm in the utter effacement. One day of another year another driver carried us by a place where he said he used to bring a lady from the North whose family home it had once been, and where, beyond the squalor of a negro suburb, an opening in the scrub-pine and palmetto stretched a wilding lawn under gray live-oaks and shining magnolias growing apart from one another as if from intention rather than by accident. It was so fit a place for the mansion which had once stood there in the stately keeping of the slave-holding past that one must look twice to make sure that the vanished home was not haunting the scene. The Northern lady who frequented it was only far off akin to those who had once dwelt there, and it did not seem that her visits were the effect of family piety; but she came and came as long as she remained in St. Augustine, and as we should have come if we had remained in reach of the beautiful, wistful spot.

As for the allure of St. Augustine itself, it was largely that of all small cities not densely built over their area, and it kept the tradition of a country town in dooryards with flowers, and back yards with homely vegetables, and here and there a vacant lot where the sweet corn and the pea vines flourished, not remote from the centers of commerce and fashion which, as I have said, do not intermit their business or pleasure on Sundays. I liked driving in the outlying streets which had once hoped to be avenues, but when Palm Beach and Miami had taken the hope of all-winter resort from St. Augustine had given it up (not in desperation so much as in resignation) and become gently weed-grown and grass-grown roadways. Where the tops of the wayside oaks or cedars arched together overhead, they were of a gloom that was very pleasant, and where the colonnading and arcading ceased, it was still a pensive pleasure to find oneself passing the simple gardens and lawns, not too wild-grown, of houses that had quite ceased trying to be the winter homes of well-to-do Northern invalids, and were now either for sale outright, or were putting off the inevitable hour by offering furnished rooms to let. Every point of the winning city had its moment of charm, and I did not yield a fonder allegiance to the great Ponce de Leon when that hostelry gathered a rich sunset in its clustering palms, and lifted its roofs and towers above them in the lingering afterglow, than to the Plaza of a sunny morning when my home-towners ranged themselves with their home-papers on the benching in the checkered shade, or then, when the full moon sailed above the campanile of the cathedral, and the alligator dreamed in his fountain, and the old Spanish market-house tried to remember which of the home-towners it was that beat at checkers during the long games of the forenoon. It was fine also when the swift twilight fled before the dusk over the waters that stretched between St. Augustine and St. Anastasia; but no finer than other divisions of the day at other places. If I were driven to choose, I should favor a mild Sunday forenoon on the road crossing from farther St. George Street over the water-gate that keeps the estuary of Maria Sanchez full, independently of the changing tide. It is then a smooth, motionless mirror, where the distant towers and roofs of the city glass themselves with a certain delicate beauty of line and color, and let you imagine them in whatever story of the city's past you like. I myself like some idyllic passage of it not too weighted down with fact, and not above sympathy with such homely effects as the reedy pastures of the shore, and the rather shabby cows grazing there in the keeping of colored mothers past more active cares. If you are for a more romantic outlook, you are welcome to the long expanse of the southward savannah, fenced along the horizon by the shadowy walls of woodland. But I think we shall come together in our pleasure of the river's name, called after whatever Spanish maid or matron Maria Sanchez might have been, and that we shall like it better, and find it the sweeter on our tongues for being her surname as well as her Christian name.

Matron or maid, Señora or Señorita, it would not be more endearing if it were of the oldest Spanish derivation than if it were of that Minorcan origin which lends to the history of St. Augustine the pathos of a people cruelly injured. The children of this people have multiplied and prospered in the friendly air of the place for more than a hundred years, now, since an alien governor rescued them from a wrong which an alien oppressor had done them. Under their name and with them many poor Greeks and Italians were lured from Minorca when the islanders were brought to Florida by the Englishman who promised them home and country in his employ, and after he had got them to his lands practically enslaved them. They seem to have been something like our colonial Redemptioners in the terms of their emigration, but when they found themselves doomed lifelong to work out the price of their transit, in no hope of rescue from their tyrant till one of them who had heard of English law stole away to St. Augustine, and asked the English governor if they could be held against their will, without land or wages; and the governor answered, with what roar of disclaimer the reader chooses to imagine. Certainly not! Then their Moses went back to them, and led them up out of their bondage at New Smyrna to St. Augustine and left their English tyrant with the machinery of his indigo farms to rust and ruin. Ever since they have been an admirably industrious element in their city of refuge, and honored for their virtues. But it is said that they keep to themselves away from their kind neighbors, irreparably wounded in their pride by the conditions of their past sufferings. For my own part I would like to believe that all that beauty and grace which I liked to attribute to the blood of the race dominant in the city for three hundred years, had come down to our day through these deeply wronged Minorcans; and I would not have the shadow of their tragedy rest, however lightly, upon the sunny picture of St. Augustine which remains in my remembrance. Other shadows there were, as there are in all the memories of life. Sometimes the butcher would not send home the meat in time, or the sort of meat that was ordered; sometimes the grocer would not send anything at any time, until he was prodded over the telephone; but in the end we did not starve, and meanwhile we continued in the hope that the boys carrying baskets before

them on their bicycles were coming to us with them.

Otherwise our days went by in a summer succession the whole winter through, but if now and then a day was unseasonably wintry, we justly blamed our native North for it. I have tried, faithfully if not successfully, to give some notion of the place and its resources for the exile who has merely come away to escape care, and I hope I have not exaggerated them. I have confessed that the drives were not so many as I could wish, but the pleasant walks were more than I could take, and our excursions in suburb or beyond always offered some interesting spectacle or experience. There would be a house, left unoccupied by its owner for the winter, which we would occupy for the moment at a merely nominal rent; there was a certain ship's carpenter whom we liked to see building a small yacht in his back yard, remote from any of the surrounding waters; and in a garden beside a house not otherwise memorable there was the passion of a half-grown kitten for a hen which, as the cat rubbed against the scandalized and indignant fowl, afforded a spectacle of unrequited affection that might well have been studied for a painting on the cover of a popular magazine; there were wide, wilding spaces which the prosperity of former years had meant for house-lots, and there were others where houses had once stood, and then fallen away, leaving flowery tangles of bushes and briers behind them. But the great charm of the town was in the town itself, and chiefly characteristic of it was our own St. George Street, which, whether it followed the Maria Sanchez away in cottages or bungalows of divers ideals to the border of the far-reaching southward savannah, or led northward beyond the Plaza, was somehow more Old World in effect than other thoroughfares of the town. There were not merely the shops where everything you wanted or did not want was offered you, but there was here and there a Spanish house, sometimes tottering with age, but in one instance at least keeping its ancient state of coquina walls flush with the street and with a stretch of garden beside it, and on the street beyond it the appealing ruin of like houses left by the last fire. Somewhat early in the season, the old thoroughfare entered into a generous commercial rivalry with King Street, and equipped itself with colored electric lamps strung overhead in gay strands from side to side. By night or by day, with its little shops and its cracking walls, and people walking up and down its middle among the vehicles, it was very, very South-European. But it had places where you could hardly keep from buying the latest magazines, or deny the claim of your home-paper wherever your home was in the Middle West. Promptly, twenty-four hours late, there were not only the New York papers, but the Chicago, the Cleveland, the Cincinnati papers, with news which had kept quite fresh on the long way south. But, above all, St. George Street was the directest way to the old fort San Marco, and to the city gates which remain another monument ol the Spanish will to be fair as well as strong. Our great architect McKim could not find a nobler suggestion for his Harvard gates than these gave, and one who goes to Cambridge may imagine from them the chief ornament of St. Augustine. They are indeed only the pillars of the gates, with a bit of the ancient wall beside each, and how the fortification was continued from them I never could quite realize, or whether in palmetto logs or coquina walls. The old embankment which once stretched away on either side was long ago leveled with the plain, but you can still imagine anything you like of it. You cannot imagine too much of St. Augustine anywhere within its vanished walls, or in the characteristic landscape, where it lies a vision of unique appeal in our commonplace American world.

[THE END.]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A CONFESSION OF ST. AUGUSTINE ***

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