

THROUGH THORNY PATHS.

By MARY ROWENA COTTER.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

In the secrecy of her own room Agnes spent many sad hours and would gladly have given up all her wealth to go back where she was a year ago...

At her first ball, Agnes rebelled against the low-cut, sleeveless dress she was given to wear, but her husband and companion insisted upon it...

Spring came, and with it the return of the birds and the flowers in the beautiful gardens, but the sweet notes of the little feathered songsters reminded Agnes so much of home that she wept...

"Wait until spring," he said, "then you will be stronger." Without a word she turned away to hide her tears, for she knew that her husband's strong will could not be broken...

"Please send him up to my room at once," she said to the servant, "and you," turning to her companion, who seldom left her...

Wealth and luxury were everywhere visible, and he saw it all; but his attention was fixed upon the costly cradle, where reposed the sleeping infant, of whose existence he had been ignorant...

The young priest brought the child to her and she soon soothed it to sleep again. Then she whispered, "I am so glad to see you, Thomas, I know God sent you here when I needed you so much."

"It is all my own fault, and God has punished me for the wrong I have done. I wanted wealth and I have it, and I have a kind husband, too, but—" She buried her face in her hands.

"But what, Agnes? Tell me all. You can trust me now as you did when you were at home." In tones of bitterness she told him what had happened since last they parted, but he was painfully conscious that it was not as the little Agnes of other days had talked to him...

"You have suffered much for your sin, but God will forgive if you are truly penitent." "I am, I am, and I pray that I may make one more good confession and see baby baptized before I die, but Edward has me watched closely, and will not allow a priest to come near the house."

able when you objected to my marriage. The sooner it is over the better, for my husband will be home to-morrow and he must not know even that you were here.

As he took the purple stole from his pocket and was about to put it around his neck she made an effort to kneel, but seeing her weakness her cousin objected. Covering her own face with her hands she made what was to be her last confession, after which she insisted upon kneeling while he pronounced the absolution.

Agnes, too, thought that the child could not live, but he was such a comfort to her that she earnestly prayed that he might be spared until she was called, and then she hoped that with his baptismal robe unsullied he might be taken home.

On Mr. Daton's return he was informed by one of the servants that a priest who was a relative of his wife's had spent the night at the house, and it was with difficulty he controlled his anger on entering her room.

"So you had a visitor, Agnes," he said. She looked at him, but said nothing.

"I know all about it Agnes, so you need not deny it."

"Yes, Cousin Thomas, whom you met at my home, called to see me on his way to the West, but he left on the noon train."

"I am sorry, Edward, that you are offended, but it was such a pleasure for me to see some one from home."

Almost at the last hour, Agnes clasped her child to her bosom, showed tears and kisses upon his innocent face and renewed her earnest prayer that he might soon be with her.

Like the social life she had enjoyed for one short season, the funeral was a grand one. The minister from the most fashionable church in the city preached a glowing sermon on her who in the bright beauty of her youth had thus early been taken away from a loving husband and darling child; then a long prayer was offered by the pastor of Mr. Daton's church, not for the poor soul that stood alone before its God, but, like the sermon, intended to console and flatter a rich husband. Could Agnes have spoken from her costly cabinet she would have cried out in rebellion

and begged rather for one simple prayer which from the lips of even a poor beggar might have brought her nearer her eternal reward. The ceremony over, the funeral cortege wended its way to the cemetery, where in a magnificent vault beside the parents of Mr. Daton Agnes was laid to rest.

The husband returned home and for a short time sadly mourned the death of his fair wife; but he was still young and his sorrow was, alas! short lived. His child, which he at first feared he would lose, grew strong after the mother's death, and his whole affections were centered on the little one. Aiter a time he grew tired of leaving baby Edward entirely to the care of servants, and he, too, growing lonely again without a companion. Accordingly in less than two years the grand home which Agnes had named "Innisfallen," had another mistress, a young Protestant woman of wealth and position. Happily there was one tender spot in her proud nature for the baby whom she loved as ardently as she would had it been of her own flesh and blood.

CHAPTER III.

"Oh, Nellie, I have such good news," and little Cecelia O'Kane's dark eyes grew larger and brighter as she burst into the room where her only sister was busily engaged with several letters which must be written before to-morrow.

Without laying down her pen, Nellie glanced up from her work, noting the bright expression upon her sister's face. That pretty smiling countenance reminded her so much of her mother that she could have lost hours in gazing upon her, and in her own eyes might be plainly seen the fact that Cecelia was all the world to her, as she should be, for the two sisters were all that was left of a once happy family.

"What is it, little sister?" asked Nellie.

"Little sister," repeated Cecelia, throwing her hat on a chair; "that is one of the misfortunes of being small. Do you forget that I am almost sixteen?" and she drew herself up proudly.

"You are tall enough, Cecelia, and I hope you will remain just as you are, because mother was small like yourself."

"And I suppose I should be content to be like poor mamma, but it is sometimes inconvenient, especially when one has one's own living to earn."

"Time enough to think of that Cecelia after you have graduated. But the good news of which you speak, what is it?"

Cecelia's eyes fairly danced as she took up the morning paper and read: "WANTED—A young lady as companion for a middle aged widow; one who understands French preferred. Apply at No. — avenue between 1 and 5 p.m."

"What can that have to do with us?" asked Nellie.

"A great deal, Nellie," said Cecelia, seating herself on a low stool at her sister's feet, looking smilingly up into her face. "Do you know who it is?"

"No. How should I know when no name is given?"

"And you cannot guess?"

"No, not being acquainted in that part of the city."

"Then I will tell you. It is Mrs. Daton, who lives alone with her servants at Innisfallen, the grand mansion on the hill."

"But I am no help to you, Nellie, and it seems unfair for you to be doing all of the work while I do none."

"You help me a great deal, Cecelia by writing so many of my letters for me. Indeed, if it were not for you I would hardly be able to keep up the vast correspondence which the company has left in my hands."

"I have a way of helping you far more now, and I intend to do it."

"Not until you have graduated. Remember, Cecelia, I promised mother that I would keep you in school, and I intend to do it."

"I have another year to go, and that would be all foolishness and selfishness as well, when I can get such a good position now."

"If you wait another year you can do as well, perhaps better; but you have not told me about how you applied for the position at Mrs. Daton's."

"I called there this afternoon, and oh, Nellie, if you could have seen the grand reception room where she received me. I could hardly describe it to you now, but it was furnished beautifully and just like what we sometimes read about in stories."

"Never mind about that now; it is yourself I am interested in."

"Well, when I was left alone in that room by the servant I really trembled for fear; then after a few minutes Mrs. Daton came downstairs dressed in an elegant black silk, but she smiled so kindly that I was not at all afraid of her. When I told her my errand she looked at me in amazement and said that I was far too young to be out of school."

"She was more than surprised when I told her my age, and she said I did not look over fourteen. Her manner was so discouraging at first that I felt like running from the house; but that kind smile was still there, and I found courage to tell her that I had a good French as well as English education. That seemed to surprise her, but she asked me a question in French and she was so pleased with my answer that she continued her conversation in French for some time. You should have heard how she praised me for speaking so well. She took a French story book from the table and asked me to read which I did."

"A French novel, I suppose," said Nellie, slightly frowning.

"Well, yes, and after I had read the first chapter she was so pleased that she told me she had had several applicants, none of which suited her as well as myself. She asked me about my family, and when I told her I was an orphan and had only you she seemed more interested in me, and told me that her only objection was my age, but that I might call again to-morrow and she would make arrangements."

"But Cecelia, you cannot, you must not go. I could never consent to your leaving school until you have finished."

"Not even when I have so good a position in view? You certainly cannot refuse. It is well enough for girls who have their parents and plenty of money to think of graduating, but I realize as well as yourself that we are poor, very poor, and I am not blind to the fact that you are wearing yourself out working for me."

"Do not say that Cecelia; I am young and strong and it is a pleasure for me to work for my little sister, especially since I promised mother that I would do it."

"I know you are willing to work for me, sister, and I appreciate it so much, but I cannot permit it when I have means of doing for myself, and I am sure if mother were here and could speak she would say I was doing right."

"I am afraid not, Cecelia, so you had better give up all thoughts of Mrs. Daton and apply yourself more closely to your studies."

"Because it seems to me that Mrs. Daton, with her many vain, worldly ideas and her French novels, would hardly be the proper companion for my little sister, and as her companion you are risking your faith, for I have always heard it said that the Datons are bitter enemies of the Catholic Church."

"I cannot believe that of her, for so many false things are told about people. I told her I was a Catholic and she did not seem to care, but if she did she could not change me. I would fight to the last."

Nellie understood too well the enthusiastic nature of her little sister

to say more. She could only pray for her and leave the rest to the development of time, when the girl would have leisure to think for herself.

"We will say no more on the subject now, Cecelia, for I have a great many letters to write this evening and I wish to get them finished. Besides, I am getting very hungry."

Cecelia took the hint and hastened to prepare the evening meal, which was soon ready. She was an excellent cook for a school girl, and in the bright prospects of her own good luck she prepared a much daintier repast than usual. But in spite of the fact that Nellie had declared herself hungry, her heart was too full to eat much, and for once Cecelia's thoughts were too much occupied to notice it.

After the supper was cleared away the girls sat down together, Nellie to continue her writing while Cecelia applied herself to her school work. At ten o'clock the younger sister laid aside her books and prepared to retire, but Nellie still worked on with increased zeal. Cecelia knelt at her bedside, said the Rosary, then going to her sister said:

"Nellie, are you not coming to bed now?"

"Yes, in a little while; I have just a few more letters to write."

"It is half past ten, and you will tire yourself out. Do leave them until morning and try and get some rest."

"They must go by the first morning mail, and it will not take me long to finish them. Go to bed darling, and pleasant dreams."

Cecelia kissed her sister and soon was sleeping soundly, but Nellie, poor tired Nellie, worked on. It mattered not to her if she were tired and her head ached; she was working for her Cecelia, her darling little sister whom she had promised her mother she would care for until she was educated and could do for herself.

Cecelia was all she had to love and do for now, and she truly loved her with more than a mother's love; but unknown to strangers there was another who was daily remembered in her prayers and for whom she shed many bitter tears in secret. At last the clock in the city hall chimed the hour of 2; the last letter had been finished, and putting it in the envelope she prepared to retire. Several times she had nearly fallen asleep over her work, but tired as she was she would not omit her evening prayer, so she knelt before her mother's favorite painting of the Sacred Heart one of the relics left from better days, and prayed earnestly for her little sister. Arising at last as the clock struck the half hour, she bent over her for another good night kiss. Cecelia was sleeping soundly, with the sweet smile of innocence on her lovely face.

"Dear little sister," thought Nellie, "how much more like poor mother she grows every day." And now the sleeping figure reminded her forcibly of the face she had seen in the coffin for her mother in death, relieved of the cares of a sad life, had worn a sweet, peaceful smile.

"God protect her," she murmured, "and keep her as good and pure as our angel mother was; but spare her, dear Lord, from such a life."

As late as she had retired, Nellie was the first to awake in the morning, and she had breakfast ready before arousing Cecelia. The subject of the preceding evening was again referred to, and before Nellie went to her work she had almost won from her sister a promise to go and tell Mrs. Daton that she could not accept her offer. It was hard for her to do it, for life in such a beautiful home and in company with such a wealthy and refined woman was just what Cecelia's bright, ambitious nature craved. All night she had been dreaming of the stately mansion, even that she herself was Mrs. Daton and the mistress of Innisfallen. This she told to Nellie in the most glowing terms, but it only made Nellie sadder.

(To be Continued.)

NO POLITICS.

No more political meetings in Catholic Church school halls, no more interference in purely party politics by priests—that is the edict which has gone forth from Archbishop Messner of Milwaukee.