

THROUGH THORNY PATHS.

BY MARY ROWENA COTTER.

CHAPTER XVI.

Amongst the work of charity the cousins had taken upon themselves...

Young as she was, Cecelia's visit to this desolate place taught her many a deep lesson which could never have been learned from books...

A week passed, another pleading letter came from home which grieved her sadly, for she had not received a cent...

Thoughts of her mother and the little ones at home suddenly rushed upon her, and with them the memory of how she had been put off from time to time with false promises...

"My poor woman, you are in trouble. Can I not do something for you?" "Nothing," was the cold reply...

The girl was the eldest of a family of four. Her father had died when she was quite young, leaving her widow penniless and obliged to work hard for the poor maintenance of herself and little ones...

"Freed," she said bitterly, "I have no such hopes. The evidence against me is too strong, and I can only pay the penalty by long imprisonment."

take her back, and make some allowance for lost time. From house to house she went, vainly seeking employment...

Her time was not served out; at the end of six months her health had so completely failed that she was pardoned and sent home, where she soon died...

It was about three weeks after the fire described in the preceding chapter when our heroine was met one morning after Mass by the warden...

Aside from the interest she took in him as being the cause of the awful scene she had witnessed, she gave him little more thought...

"I wish I could believe as you do, miss, and there was a time when I could, but I have lost all faith in such people..."

"Yes, I did speak to the warden about having you call when you visited the prison again."

"Perhaps I have done wrong in bringing two young ladies like your-

accuser has wealth and position on her side." Cecelia believed the girl's story in every detail, but all she could do was to speak a few consoling words...

This was only one of the sad examples of human misery and suffering brought before the tender heart of Cecelia, but each had its new interest for her, and if, perchance, she found among the prisoners many hard-hearted wretches who were evil by their very natures...

In the humility she had been accustomed to practice all her life, and which as yet had met no severe trial, Cecelia realized not the pride this feeling covered, and she never stopped to consider how she would really feel if such a sad misfortune were true...

It was about three weeks after the fire described in the preceding chapter when our heroine was met one morning after Mass by the warden...

Aside from the interest she took in him as being the cause of the awful scene she had witnessed, she gave him little more thought, until informed that he had made inquiries concerning her, and wished to have her visit to him...

"I wish you success," laughed Agnes, "though, to speak plainly, I think you often carry your charities too far, and it is very imprudent for you to take so much notice of such people..."

"I have been told, sir, that you wished to see me." "Yes, I did speak to the warden about having you call when you visited the prison again."

"Perhaps I have done wrong in bringing two young ladies like your-

self into my dreary cell, and I know that I am unfit company for such as you after the hard life I have led; but I once had a kind and loving mother, and two sisters, and you, Miss Daton, reminded me so much of them that I wished to see you again."

"The word suffering, child, does not express the terrible anguish that fills the heart of the guilty criminal; but you may go now, for I am not fit to have two such angels in my presence..."

Agnes showed evidence of vexation as they passed from one ward to another, but Cecelia was unusually bright and talkative...

"Understand it, Agnes! How can I help understanding, when I was in the very midst of it, and witnessed it all. Do you think I could forget so terrible an experience this soon?"

"Public opinion often errs, especially when fortune frowns on a man and we must not be too harsh, for I believe there is some good in his nature..."

"I do. If I can be of any service to him I shall feel that my time has not been spent in vain."

"Cecelia, please come to my room, I wish to talk with you," said grandmother one afternoon about six weeks after the fire.

"Cecelia," she said at length, "do you really believe that the Catholic Church is the only true Church?"

"That is my firm belief." "What, then, do you suppose is the fate of hundreds of good people who have lived and died outside the Catholic Church?"

"It may sound like a contradiction grandma, but it is not. 'Out of the pale of the Church there is no salvation simply means that we are obliged, under pain of incurring mortal sin, to believe and practice the true religion (which is the Catholic religion) when once it is in our power to do so..."

"I certainly do, grandma; did you ever know me to be guilty of falsehood?" "Never, Cecelia, never, and I hope you will forgive me if I appeared to doubt you..."

"I understood you to say," she said, vacantly, as if to herself, "that those outside the Church who have a chance to learn its teachings and do not become members of it cannot be saved. Am I right?"

"Why do you think so, grandma?" "Because I have been fully convinced of the truth of your religion."

"And you never told me before? How could I? My pride forbade it; I was unwilling to acknowledge that I had been wrong in my belief."

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"Cecelia," she said at length, "do you really believe that the Catholic Church is the only true Church?"

"You are a noble girl, Cecelia, and it puts me to shame to see one so young show signs of an intellect so far superior to my own."

"You have never shown it, child, you have never shown it, for almost from your infancy you have been to me more like a woman of superior intellect and strength of character..."

"Remember it I do, distinctly; but you were so young then I thought you had long since forgotten it."

"Oh, grandma, this is too much," interrupted Cecelia, smiling; "our Church is very strongly opposed to idolatry."

"I understand it now; you have made that point very clear to me, but I beg to apologize on the plea that I was not wholly to blame for the errors of my early training..."

"Good example! What have I ever done to merit such praise?" "Many things, Cecelia; all your life you have been a living example of what a true Christian should be."

"I did only what I considered my duty, and asked no praise, as I did not deserve it."

"Then you have been studying all this time without letting us know it?"

To be Continued.

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