

# THE TWO COUSINS.

By MARY ROWENA COTTER.

## CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

His face, as well as the tender tone of his voice told that he spoke the truth, and Virginia strove to conquer the temptation that presented itself. Never before had she realized how much she admired the noble character of the man who had risen from the depths of inebriety to such a perfect Christian manhood. It was all due to Agnes and her faithful prayers, but still she knew that it was not without many severe trials that he had become what he was.

She thought of Alexia and the memory of what it must have cost her, who was then in the bloom of youth, with gilded promises of a long and happy life with a devoted husband, to say "no," gave her strength to conquer the temptation. In a voice that betrayed not the slightest sign of emotion she said: "Mr. Malloy, you may have your daughter, and I am more than happy to give her into the keeping of her own father with whom I know that she will be very happy; but as for myself, I have other plans which will render it impossible for me to accept your kind offer."

He was wholly unprepared for this, but her manner was so firm, though very gentle, that he hardly dared say much more. "It cannot be possible," he said, "that loving Agnes as you do you would thus easily give her up when you might keep her with you."

"Mr. Malloy," said Virginia, "no living mortal can ever know the deep love I have felt for your child since the day that, as a little blind orphan, she first came to me as if begging to fill the place in my heart left vacant by the death of my own child. She has brought so many blessings to my home that each succeeding year has made her still dearer to me, but since you first came I have been expecting a separation, so I am fully prepared for it. As her father you have the first claim upon her."

Before he could answer Agnes returned, and Virginia, under pretense of having some work to finish, left the room. She did not return until Agnes called her in to bid her father good night, and as soon as he was gone the girl threw her arms around her neck and said, "Dear mamma, papa has told me all about his plans and how he wishes to marry you."

"Did he, Agnes," asked Virginia.

"Yes, mamma," was the reply, "and I am so sorry that you refused him, for he does love you and feels very bad over it; but you will think it over, mamma, won't you, for we three might be so happy together."

Agnes spoke in that sweet pleading tone which Virginia had ever found it hard to resist, and her heart fondly clung to her, but her reply was, "Dear Agnes, you are now sixteen and can you not keep house for your father without me? We cannot always live together."

"I suppose I might, mamma," said Agnes, "but it would be so lonely, and I cannot give you up. But what would you do, mamma, it would certainly be very lonely for you here alone?"

"I do not intend to remain here," said Mrs. Hurley, "but let us talk no more of it to-night."

The next morning Virginia drove to the asylum and told her cousin of her intention to enter the Visitation order as soon as she saw Agnes installed as her father's housekeeper.

Sister Agnes Bernard could hardly believe that she understood aright and said, "Virginia, do you mean it, do you know what you are thinking of doing?"

"I think I do, for I have contemplated it for some time," said Virginia.

"And you never told me before," said her cousin.

Virginia smiled and said, "several years ago, Sister, I had a little cousin who kept a secret from me and I have been trying to pay her back."

"Yes, Virginia, I remember," said Alexia, "but you know the circumstances were so different, for that cousin would only have added to her own difficulties had she told you of her intentions; but does Agnes know of this?"

"No," said Virginia, "I wanted you to be the first to share my secret."

After a long and confidential talk Alexia said, "Virginia, if you have considered well what you are to do, and are resolved to carry out your pious intentions, it is best to keep it from Agnes no longer."

"How do you think she will take it, Sister?" asked Virginia.

"I hardly know," was the reply, "I suppose, however, that she will not wish to part with you at first; but she is such a saintly girl that she will hardly oppose you very strongly, especially as she has her father left to her; but if she does, remember, dear cousin, the severe trials that St. Jane de Chantal, the foundress of the Visitation order, had to undergo in separating herself from her own beloved children. Remember, too, the blessed rewards she received. Agnes will never throw herself in your way and compel you to walk over her body as did the son of the holy foundress."

"Oh, God, Thou hast given me too much happiness, this is more than I deserved," said Sister Agnes Bernard within herself when her cousin had gone, and her prayers that night were mingled with thanksgiving and supplications for graces for her cousin to do well the will of God.

As might be expected, Mr. Malloy and Agnes joined in strongly opposing Virginia's choice; but the latter, putting her own feelings aside in her eagerness to see God's will accomplished, soon gave way and even insisted upon making most of Virginia's coarse wardrobe. Once she said, "If it were not for papa, I would like to go with you, mamma, for I know you will be very happy."

Agnes' Christmas present was a deed of the home which had been Mrs. Hurley's wedding gift, and on the same day her father came to live with her and she was installed as mistress of his home. Virginia remained as a guest until the second of January, when she went to visit her cousin, intending to remain at the Asylum for a week.

Agnes intended to spend the day before her departure with her, but Virginia dreading the thought of saying good bye to her beloved child, took her departure early in the morning, leaving a loving farewell message which was delivered by Alexia.

The parting between the cousins was long to be remembered by each, and they were glad they were alone for to them it was too sacred to be witnessed even by Agnes. For years their lives had drifted far apart, but now that their hearts had become one in the love of their heavenly Spouse, the blessed attachment of childhood had returned, and once more they understood each other's heart as of old. The tears they shed were tears of holy joy rather than sorrow. They felt confident that they would never again meet in this world; but there were thoughts of the blessed meeting in a blissful eternity where the cousins would never again be separated.

## CHAPTER XIII.

"Unknown to fashion's tinsel throng,  
The soulless and the vain;  
Unknown where ringeth folly's song,  
And pleasure's syren strain,  
Unknown where fickle fame bestows  
Her evanescent crown,  
While for a fleeting instant glows  
The light of earth's renown,  
Unknown in life, unknown in death,  
Thus would she live and die—  
She needed not the trumpet-breath  
To wait her deeds on high;  
But where the plague at noon-day  
Trod o'er earth his fatal sway,  
And where beneath his blighting rod,  
The stricken thousands lay;  
Where fiercely burned the fever flame,  
And wrung the dying groan,  
Full well the Sister's holy name  
And gentle face were known,  
And while life's latest murmur breath  
Ed on her blessings fond,  
Here faded coronal was wreath'd the  
"Jaspur walls" beyond.  
She saw in every tortured one, her  
Anguish laden Lord;  
For Him her holy work was done,  
From Him it claimed reward.  
What! though no flaunting banners  
Wave, where mercy's martyr  
Sleeps;  
What though above her nameless  
Grave no earthly mourners weep;  
When soared her soul on eager wing,  
Beyond the gates of pain,  
The white-robed legions of the King  
Were her triumphant train.  
And where Love wrote her blessed  
Name above His radiant throne,  
In heaven's light of fadeless fame she  
Lives, forever known."

—Harriet M. Skidmore.

In a crowded southern city the yellow fever was raging in all its horror; prostrating victims everywhere, visiting alike the homes of rich and poor and hastening the unfortunate inhabitants away to their graves in scores. Strong men to-day in the vigor of manhood with promises of long lives, to-morrow might be numbered among the dead or dying. The sight was such as might strike terror to the strongest heart; but through it all two bands of gentle, noble-hearted women worked with unflinching zeal, confining their labors not only to the hospitals, but fearlessly going about wherever their services were needed. Few who watched their calm, and in many instances smiling faces, as they went about performing their loathsome duties for which they were to receive no earthly recompense, would have dreamed that among them were many who had been delicately brought up in the midst of wealth; but who these were was unknown.

The women were no other than the Sisters of Charity from the Hospital, and the Sisters of Mercy who, on being compelled to close the fashionable young ladies' academy of which they had charge, had offered their services to the afflicted. Many a heart-felt "God bless you, Sister," had they received from those to whom they had ministered, but even this was more than they asked, for theirs was a work of love. While they ministered to the wants of the body, they thought more of the souls so soon to be summoned into the presence of their Creator, and doubtless many a sinner was by them brought to repentance at the last hour.

A sultry August morning was just dawning, bringing with it a promise of another day perhaps more fatal than yesterday, when a slight form in the black garb of a Sister of Mercy was about to leave one of the class rooms of the Academy which had been turned into a temporary hospital ward. Her face was thin and haggard from constant watching with the sick, but the sweet smile of Alexia Grey was still there. For several nights she had taken but little rest, and in the morning had stolen away, only long enough to hear Mass and receive what might to her prove to be the Holy Viaticum.

Sister Agnes Bernard had been removed to this convent a short time after Virginia left home, and for a long time had held one of the highest positions in the academy. When the fever broke out she was one of the first to ask permission to care for the sick. She had had a vague presentiment from the beginning that her death was near at hand; but this only increased her zeal, for she argued within herself that her life, which in the eyes of others had borne such beautiful fruits, had been useless and she wanted to do something for her Creator. In vain did her companions entreat her to spare herself, for while she felt herself daily growing weaker, she insisted on keeping her post until now when well nigh exhausted, she started to take a little rest. Her mind turned to the chapel, but the chaplain having been taken sick the day before, there was to be no Mass.

As she was passing through the door a man's weak voice said "Sister."

She turned to the cot on which he lay, and something in the pale face reminded her of some one she had seen before, but who it was she could not recall.

"Sister," he said, "will you please give me a glass of water?"

She obeyed, raising his head with one hand, while with the other she held the glass to his lips, then she rearranged his pillow, and in doing so found a little pearl rosary. "A Catholic," she thought. She looked at the face upon which death had already left its impression, and said, "Have you had the priest?"

"No, Sister," was the reply, "I am not a Catholic."

"I thought you were," she said, "when I found this under your pillow," and she held up the beads.

His wan face brightened at the sight. "They are mine," he said, "please give them to me, and you may send me a priest for I wish to die a Catholic."

Sister Agnes Bernard left the room and a Sister whom she met at the door, she asked, "Do you know the man in the first bed to your right is?"

"No, Sister," was the reply, "he is a stranger and was brought in

from the street about noon yesterday. There seems to be no hope for him."

"So I perceive," said the other, "and he wishes to die a Catholic so let us send a messenger for a priest at once and pray that he may live until his wish is gratified. I am going to take a little rest now and please watch him until my return."

"Yes, Sister, go, for you need it," said her companion, "I will look after your patient and will try to keep him alive until the priest comes."

With a feeble step she went, not to her room, but to the chapel where the hour she had been accustomed to spend before the Holy Sacrifice was devoted to prayer for the dead and dying. She felt that if she went to bed she might never rise again, so resolved, if possible, to keep her post until the last. With renewed mental if not bodily strength she returned to her patients. "Has the priest come yet?" she asked of the Sister who stood beside the man who so strangely interested her.

"No," was the reply, "I have just received word that our dear chaplain is dying. He worked faithfully he fainted just as he had finished anointing a poor negro, and had to be carried home."

"Another martyr to Christian charity," said Sister Agnes Bernard, reverently, "and what an example for me who has done so little for eternity. But can we not find a priest for this man who so earnestly desires baptism?"

"I hope so, Sister," was the reply, "I have sent a messenger to look for a priest. There are several others here who desire the Sacraments."

Alexia looked around to see where her services were most needed; but she was too weak to do much, so she sat down by the stranger's bedside and asked him if he had any relatives to whom he wished to send a message.

"None," he replied, "I am the last of my family and am as well pleased to die here among strangers as anywhere else, though I wish that I might be buried with my wife and daughter."

"Where is that?" she asked.

"In England," was the reply, "so our graves must be many miles apart."

"Yes," she said, "but your spirits may dwell together in Heaven."

"I hope so," and after a pause he added, "Sister you remind me of a very dear friend I once had, and if it will not tire you too much, I would like to tell you about her and also something of my life since I lost her."

"Tell me if you wish," she said, "but who was she?"

She hardly knew why she asked the question, and she was wholly unprepared for his answer when he said, "Her name was Alexia Grey, but she is now a nun, like yourself, and the remembrance of her makes me glad to know that I am to die among the Sisters."

Could it be possible. She looked at him again and recognized the once well-known features of Andrew Hurley. Her first impulse was to flee from his presence before he identified her; but when she saw how near to death he was, she could not refuse to listen to his story, and who can blame her for feeling a little curiosity as to how his life had been spent. She felt her face growing cold, but she knew that there was no color to leave it. She excused herself to attend to the patient in the next cot, and when returning she took a seat where he could not see her face, she betrayed not the slightest sign of emotion.

In a weak voice he told the story of herself which she had often tried to believe was buried in the long forgotten past, and the glowing description he gave of her smote her cruelly. Holding up the pearl rosary he said, "These belonged to her. They are all I have to remember her by, and I would not part with them for as many diamonds their size, for they have brought blessings to my life."

She took the little chaplet from him and recognized them as the same on which she had recited thousands of Paters and Aves, in years gone by. She could hardly restrain her tears when she saw how well he had kept them, and devoutly kissing the little silver crucifix, which she had thought she would never again press to her lips, she returned them.

The story which so deeply interested her heroine was as follows: Mr. Hurley has spent two years travelling through various parts of Europe, and in the meantime the disappoint-

ment of having lost the woman he had chosen for a wife prevented him from writing home. He had felt that no one could ever fill her place in his heart until he made the acquaintance of an English girl who was travelling as hired companion with the wife of a friend. She was poor, and an orphan, but well-educated and refined, and less than a year after their first meeting they were quietly married in a little Episcopalian chapel in England.

Being wealthy himself, he made her a beautiful home, and nothing that affection or money could procure for her happiness was left undone, but even when her face was wreathed in smiles there was a mysterious something which told him that she was not entirely happy. The arrival of a beautiful little daughter instead of dispelling the clouds made it darker than ever. In vain did her husband try to fathom the cause, and once almost unintentionally the question escaped him as to whether it were because she were not pleased with him. At this she burst into tears and said, "Not pleased with you, dear husband, when you are so kind to me. How can you ask such a question when I believe I have loved you more than God himself."

He never mentioned the subject again, but tried to make himself believe her happy. Of his early love she was entirely ignorant until she asked him what he wished to call the baby and his reply had been Alexia. In answer to her inquiries as to where he had found such a pretty name he told her it was the name of a dear old friend who was now a nun, and her face brightened as she said, "I know she must be very good and happy too, and I shall be pleased to name the baby for her." Then she told him that she had been educated in the convent where the daughters of many wealthy Protestants as well as Catholic attended school, and she dwelt long on the virtues of the good Sisters who had been so kind to her.

When little Alexia was ten years old her mother lay at the point of death, and when her husband proposed sending for their own minister she said, "No Andrew, please send for the priest." Mr. Hurley looked at her in amazement, but said nothing and she continued, "Andrew, won't you please grant me this one favor, when I am about to die, I would hardly have dared to ask it but I have often seen a Catholic rosary in your hands, though you have never showed it to me, and it was that gave me courage to ask you this."

"I am not a Catholic," he said, "and never intend to be one, though I must admit that I have kept Alexia Grey's rosary; but why do you wish a priest?"

"Because," she replied in a husky voice, "I am a Catholic."

"He looked at her in greater amazement and asked, "How is this, and why did you not tell me before? It cannot be that my wife, who has attended church with me for so many years, is a Roman Catholic."

"I ought to be," she said faintly, "though I am not worthy of the name," then followed her confession of how, until being turned into the world to do for herself, she had been a strict member of the Catholic faith. She had vainly tried to seek employment until an influential Protestant friend had introduced her to the lady with whom she was travelling when she met her husband. To please her employer she had attended the Episcopal church, but her heart still remained true to her own faith and she resolved to return to it as soon as she could find employment with Catholics.

"Then you were introduced to me, Andrew," she said, "and with me it was a case of love at first sight, but knowing you to be wealthy I hardly dared hope that you would stoop to notice Mrs. Sander's hired companion until you asked me to be your wife. My first impulse was to proclaim my religious belief to you, but thought that by so doing I might be in danger of losing the respect of the man who had become dearer to me than life itself. I remained awake all night trying to decide which was best, but my love for you conquered so I gave up my faith. Here she sobbed aloud and as soon as she could control herself she added, "Despite my love for you and all your kind efforts to make me happy, I have hardly seen a day's peace since our marriage, for I have never ceased to regret having given up my own religion, but had not the courage to think of returning to it until I saw

that rosary in your hands. I knew you would not refuse me the priest when you carried that." Her request was granted and after receiving the holy rites of the Church in a most sincere and penitential spirit, she drew from her husband a promise to have their daughter educated in a convent. With Alexia's rosary, which she had asked of him, clasped in her hands, she died a peaceful death, which was plainly told by the bright smile which still covered her face when they closed her coffin for the last time, and laid her away in the Catholic cemetery. At this point Mr. Hurley broke down and as soon as he could continue he said, "My daughter was all the world to me now, and I fain would have kept her with me, but she must be educated, so in accordance with her mother's wishes I sent her to a convent. How lonely I was, with them both gone, but I looked forward with joy to the time when she would be old enough to come home, but in this I was doomed to be disappointed, for in less than four months my little girl slept beside her mother."

"This rosary," he said, "she begged of me when she was going away to school, and she never gave it up until the day of her death when I visited her. She told me that one of her companions had taught her to say her prayers on them long ago and she had said the rosary for me every day since, although it was only a few weeks ago she had become a Catholic. When she returned the beads to me she asked me for her sake to keep them always with me, and to learn to use them, which I did. Although not a Catholic, I have found much consolation in praying to the Virgin Mary on those beads, which are sacred relics of those whom I have loved and lost."

His voice was growing weaker and the pallor of death was already overspreading his face as he added, "Sister, I have often felt during the seven years that have elapsed since my daughter's death that I ought to be a Catholic, but have put it off until now, which I deeply regret; but I hope that it is not too late."

"The priest is coming," said a Sister who stood by the window, and forgetting everything excepting that there was a soul to be prepared for the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism, Sister Agnes Bernard changed her position so that for the first time the eyes of the sufferer rested upon her face.

Despite changes time had wrought she was recognized, and with a smile he extended his hand and said, "Miss Grey, can it be possible that it is you?"

She would have flown but dared not leave the dying man, and with a voice which betrayed no sign of emotion she said, "I was once known as Alexia Grey, and since you have recognized me, let me assure you that, while I have ever remembered you as a dear friend, I have never regretted the happy choice I made."

"Yes," he murmured faintly, "yours was a noble choice," and he closed his eyes, while in a few brief words she tried to prepare him for the Sacrament he was about to receive.

In the doorway appeared a slight youthful figure with a boyish face, crowned by auburn curls and a pair of penetrating dark eyes which shone brightly from beneath a noble forehead of almost deathlike whiteness. "Only a boy," one might be inclined to say at first glance, and the black cassock might seem almost out of place on one apparently so young. But his youth was unnoticed by the sufferers, and many was the blessing he received as he passed from cot to cot administering the last rites of the church to the dying.

One of the first to claim his attention was Andrew Hurley, who had bowed his head in childlike simplicity to receive the cleansing waters which made him a child of the Church.

The young priest, whose name was Father Conroy, was the idolized and only son of a poor widow. During a yellow fever plague twenty-three years ago Mrs. Conroy had lost her husband and four children, all that remained being her six year old boy. She took him to the Church and offered him to the Mother of God and begged that his life might be spared. The mother's prayer was answered, and the Heavenly Queen seemed to take the little one under her protection, inspiring him in early youth to devote himself entirely to the service of her Divine Son.

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