

THROUGH THORNY PATHS.

BY MARY ROWENA COTTER.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

One thing the father was doomed to disappointment. Allyn had a beautiful voice, and his father had hoped that he would use it on the stage in giving to the public in those parts of the land the ideas he himself so strongly held; but while he firmly believed them all, he had other plans in view. He intended going before the public, but was to win fame with his voice in another way. He wished to go on stage. At nineteen his studies were interrupted by the death of his mother, and brought up as he had with no hope of any meeting with the grave, the blow was a terrible one. Only the consolation of the companionship of his mother served to arouse him from his overwhelming grief. There is no time," he said to himself, "to be wasted on idle lamentations, for to-day we are here to-morrow we are gone forever." A few days after the sad funeral, which had been conducted without prayer, he went to work with a vigor will than ever, toiling early and late. Now ambition seemed out to be rewarded, for he had engaged by the "Olintons." Tomorrow he is to make his first appearance in public with them, and two days he is to leave the city this is his last day with his mother. As we come into his presence he is entertaining her with an old plantation song she had taught him in childhood.

"How is that, mother?" he asked, as he had finished and laid aside his instrument.

"I shall remember your song long as you have left me, my son."

"I wish you could accompany me my travels, mother."

"So do I, my boy; but a mother must expect to keep her son always with her, and I must bear the separation."

"You are a noble woman, mother, matter how far I may travel, I shall not find your equal."

"Mrs. St. Clair smiled. She was used to it, true, with the compliments, but she did not believe he could speak he had changed the subject, and was talking in glowing terms of the bright life ahead of him, for he was fully determined to go for himself, if possible, a life which would live for ages after he was gone."

"And he carried down, my son, your children to your grand old man and great grandchildren," he said.

"No, not mine, but the posterity others who shall know me."

"Why not your own, my son?"

"Because, mother, I never intend to marry, and our family name shall live with my death."

"Why, my boy, what has put so an idea into your head?"

"Because if I marry, the woman I marry must be dearer to me than all other created beings."

"That is right, Allyn; it should be with every one who is about to give a partner for life."

"Yes, I am fully aware of it; but I am only one woman in this world whom I can say that I truly love."

"And who is that, may I ask?"

"My own beloved mother."

"I am glad to hear that the father has always felt for my son, but I do not wish to see him all others."

"Why not, mother? Is it not natural to know that I really love her? I was a selfish mother I might say, but I look to the future of my son, and I should like to see him choose a suitable partner who can cheer his life after I am gone."

"I do not speak of leaving me, mother, for you are still young, and shall spend many a happy day after I have won fame and wealth."

"I hope so, but life is such an uncertain thing, and such a mystery, I am almost tempted to believe that there is another world where we shall enjoy the company of dear ones who are gone."

"Nonsense, mother; you remind me of those superstitious church women who are willing to suffer anything here in the hope of anything better somewhere else in the grave. What foolishness!

what utter foolishness for intelligent people of our enlightened twentieth century. It was well enough for the dark ages of the past, but not for us, mother."

"He spoke vehemently, and his mother looked at him with a strange expression, for, like his father, he was a mystery to her. But she would not admit even to herself that he was not wholly in the right."

"Mother," he said, "I hope I have not offended you, for I know that you, above all others, could not be guilty of the superstition of which I speak."

"You are right, Allyn. Certainly I shall not allow myself to believe in such nonsense."

"Good, sensible woman. How pleased father would be to hear you speak thus."

"Yes, but I must say that he might not be so well pleased if he could hear his son declare that he never intended to marry."

"I cannot help that, mother. I feel that I am destined to spend my life alone, and there are things in this world far nobler than marriage."

"You are wrong; but what is it you put ahead of having a good companion in a loving wife?"

"Well, mother, that is a hard question to answer, but for one thing I intend to win fame in the world, and as the end to which I aspire is enough to occupy my whole life, I can have no time for courtship and marriage. Besides, if I had a wife and family I should feel that my whole affection must be given to them."

"Which would be a noble thing. A good wife, instead of being a hindrance, ought to be the most helpful in attaining your end."

"Perhaps so, mother. I never thought of it in that light, but somehow I cannot understand why it has always seemed to me that I was destined to spend my life alone."

"And in that case your father's name would end with you."

"No, not necessarily, for it would be enough for the name to live, as I intend to have it live, in the annals of fame."

"I wish you every success and a long, happy life, but I am sure the time will come when, if you persist in the course you have laid out for yourself, you will grow lonely and be glad to find a suitable companion when I am gone, if not long before."

"Mistaken, mother, I know you are."

"Well, we will argue no more, then; so now for another song."

"Very well, then, what shall it be?"

"Something bright and cheerful this time, Allyn. I do admire those old plantation songs so much and I never heard them sung as you sing them, but they are too sad for to-day, when you are soon to leave me."

"Instead of the old songs he sang one which he was to render at his first appearance in the opera; full enough of life and spirit it was to please anyone, even the most gay, and his mother listened with great admiration until he had finished. Its brilliancy, however, could not keep back the tears, which would flow in his sadness to-night and her spite of her, for everything seemed to thoughts, instead of being with his gay words, were of the time when that grand voice would be singing for other ears than her own, and she could not see her darling for many weeks, perhaps months. Ere he ceased she closed her eyes to shut out the sight of him who was such a noble picture of young manhood."

"That is grand, Allyn," she said when he had finished, "and surely that voice cannot fail to win fame for you."

"Thank you, mother; I only hope that others may think the same, but the world is full of heartless critics and I often have great fears."

"You should not, Allyn. Have confidence; show the world that you fear not what it may say or think of you and I assure you of greater success than if you act the part of a coward, who is always dodging criticism."

"Right, mother, I shall try to take your advice."

After carefully packing away his last sheet of music the youth drew a chair close to his mother's side, and until the early hours of the morning they were engaged in conversation, which might have continued much

longer had not Mrs. St. Clair's eyes begun to grow heavy. Then her boy bade her good night. He had a little more packing to do, and supposed that she was asleep before he retired, but her motherly love would not allow it, and after he had fallen into a quiet slumber she stole into his room and kissed his brow, as she had often done when he was a child, a tear falling on his cheek.

The next morning, after a hurried breakfast, came the separation, and each bravely strove to keep a cheerful mood in the presence of the other.

"My dear noble boy," said Mrs. St. Clair to herself after he was gone. She had not the consolation of asking God's protection and blessing upon him, and could only stand at the window in silent bitter loneliness as the carriage drove away with him and was lost to view.

CHAPTER II.

Human nature, especially in youth, is full of fickleness and inconsistency; the resolutions made to-day are forgotten, perhaps, to-morrow, and in many instances never fulfilled. But it will be so as long as the world lasts; human nature is over the same and those who look with scorn upon the changeableness of others might under the same circumstances do worse.

On the eve of his departure from home Allyn St. Clair had earnestly declared that no woman excepting his own dear mother could ever find a place in his affections, and he had said, too, that he would not marry; but now, at the end of five months, he finds himself in love, deeply in love, while the fair object of his affection absolutely refuses to return any of that tender feeling as far as he or any man he knew was concerned her heart was as cold as a stone, but he loved her none the less for that, and he was determined to leave nothing undone by which to win so fair and lovely a prize. His mother first learned of her at Christmas, which he had gone home to spend as a national rather than a Christian holiday, and she saw plainly that although he had seen the fair beauty but once, his heart had gone with her, and she secretly hoped that if the young lady were really of good family, as he stated, he might meet her again, and receive in due time the reward of his affection.

The young lady was none other than the fair Cecelia, and the first meeting had been on the evening when in charity she had consented to sing for the benefit of the sufferers from the fire. As one who by his skill had already attained a high place in the company, he had been granted a short interview with her, which he did not forget. Her brilliant beauty had attracted him at first sight, but being what might be called a little less than a woman hater, the loveliness of her face might eventually have led him to scorn her and call himself a fool for having admired her in an hour of human weakness; but in those dark eyes he saw something else—a deep secret beauty which he could not then understand. It was indeed, only a faint shadow of the outward sign of a pure heart, or rather the image of God.

Cecelia's modest womanly dignity, compared with the bold freedom of manner found in some of the ladies connected with the troupe, spoke strongly in her favor. He believed this to be only the result of her having been so short a time out of school. On learning that she had been engaged as a member of the troupe, he resolved to do all in his power to help her remain as she was. The thought of the change her new mode of life might produce in her was distressing to him. Wholly ignorant of the dangers of the position she held, Cecelia never suspected the many little kindnesses of her benefactor, neither did she dream that he had, after a few days' acquaintance, made a resolution to win her for his wife.

At the time of rehearsal, Cecelia was never known to be absent or late, and her whole heart seemed to be given up to her efforts to obey the manager in every little detail, until on one occasion she was asked to wear an elegant costume of sea-shell pink pink, cut very low, with no sleeves and only straps of ribbon over the shoulders.

It was an elegant affair which had been worn on one or two occasions by the lady whose place she had taken, and in company with her aunt and two of the leading ladies she was in the dressing room when it was sent up. Her companions, who had greatly admired the gown, looked on in envy as she unfolded it and held it up for inspection. Her face brightened at the sight of the long train and pretty skirt, but she could not help frowning at the immodest style of the waist. Accompanying the gown was a note from the manager telling her to wear it that evening.

"Really, Miss Daton, I envy you such a beautiful dress," said one of the ladies, "but you appear not to be well pleased with it. What is wrong?"

"Enough," said Cecelia, throwing it down on a chair. "I do not intend appearing in public with it on."

"Why not?" asked the two in one breath, looking at her in amazement. "It is perfectly gorgeous and you should be proud to wear it."

"I certainly would, as I am able to fully appreciate fine clothes, but for one reason. It is cut too low."

A sneering smile, which did not escape Mrs. Cullen, passed between them.

"I do not consider that low by any means, and if you only realized how prettily it will show off your beautiful neck and arms you would not refuse to wear it."

"I prefer having my neck and arms covered when I appear in public," was the curt reply.

"That is all right on some occasions, but on the stage we are not supposed to wear street costumes with high collars that almost touch our ears and long sleeves. Such a thing would be perfectly absurd."

"I do not ask such privileges; on the contrary, I am willing to dress becomingly and intend doing all in my power to please the manager, but to appear in public in such an dress as this I consider improper in a young lady who has any respect for herself."

"There is nothing improper about it. Our manager expects it, and will be displeased if you refuse to comply with his wishes."

"Let him be displeased, then; I shall not wear that waist."

She spoke in a tone that surprised those who had hitherto believed her to be a perfect model of docility, and a light of determination flashed from her eyes. In their hearts her companions admired her, but still they could not keep back the sneer which arose to their lips.

"Do you realize, Miss Daton," said one, "how much you are taking upon yourself by refusing obedience to our master?"

"I am more than happy to comply with any reasonable demand or even slight wish from him, but this oversteps the bounds of reason, to say nothing of decency, and I repeat I shall not obey in this case."

With these words she turned to her aunt and asked her to take out one of her own reception gowns which she had worn at home. It was of a delicate canary, with elbow sleeves and the neck cut so as to show the delicate curves of her throat. Before her toilette was finished her companions had been caused away, and she had felt relieved when the door closed after them. She was deathly pale, for even the slightest disagreement with any one grated harshly on her tender nature, and had not the moment of her own appearance been drawing near she could not have witheld her tears.

"Did I give way too quickly to my temper or say too much, Aunt Nellie?" she asked, in a sweet, humble tone wholly unlike that in which she had addressed the others.

"No, Cecelia, you did right, and I admire my niece for not being afraid to defend herself, when Christian modesty demands it."

Cecelia's natural accomplishments had excited some jealousy among her less gifted companions, and they were further incensed by her refusal to associate freely with them. When necessity brought her among them, she was kind and courteous to all, but she refrained from participating in any of the amusements the members of the company had among themselves. One thing that excited a little amount of comment was that as soon as her part in the evening's entertainment was over she, in com-

pany with her aunt, would be driven directly to her hotel and always refused to leave her rooms to partake of the elaborate suppers served for the actors. Some said it was due to thrift, as she did not wish to spend any of her earnings in giving treats, and the fact that she drew a salary far greater than any of them made her appear more distasteful to her enemies. Others called her a child who had been spoiled in the convent, but would outgrow her foolishness after seeing more of the world; still another class declared that she was afraid of her aunt, who would not allow her out of her sight.

This was the state of affairs when Cecelia refused to wear the dress, and her words, to which had been added a bitter tone she had never intended, were reported to the manager before he had time to seek an explanation from her in regard to the garment, which he had at first supposed had not been worn on account of its being an improper fit. He was angered at first and would have sent for the offender and tried to compel obedience, but Allyn St. Clair, who had accidentally overheard the conversation in the dressing-room, interceded for her. After expressing his view of the incident, in which he admitted her to be a trifle too prim in matters of dress as well as other things, he said:

"As the young lady believes herself to be doing what is right, I believe it best not to interfere with her."

"Perhaps you are right, but it seems too bad to throw aside such a costly and elegant costume, when it would be so becoming to her."

"She has other dresses which, even if less costly, are not less becoming. Miss Daton cannot fail to make a beautiful appearance in whatever she may choose to wear, for I assure you that hers is a beauty not made by fine clothes or any other artificial means."

"I agree with you there, Allyn, and perhaps it is best to allow her to have her own way."

"It certainly is. If any great offense were given her she might leave us, and we cannot afford to lose such a voice or such a face."

"And your other motive, what is it, pray?" and the man could scarcely withhold a smile in asking this question, for he had read plainly the love story in the heart of the youth.

He did not blame him, but grasped an opportunity to tease him a little.

"My other motive! Are you blind; can you not see that Miss Daton is as innocent as a child? One of her greatest charms lies in her simplicity, which I would not have taken from her, and you yourself can not fail to acknowledge that the world would be better if there were more like her."

"You are right, and I respect you for your high ideal of womanhood; but have you no more personal interest in her?"

"And what if I have?" he retorted in a dignified tone. "In speaking as I have I have only sought to defend the rights of an inexperienced young woman among strangers, as I would if she were my own sister."

With this the youth left the room, and the man, who was much older and more experienced, looked admiringly after him.

"Well," he mused, "he thinks he can deceive me, but I am not so easily fooled. I wish him every success in his love affair, for I firmly believe few could be more worthy of such a true woman; but he has a difficult task before him. I firmly believe that as far as our sex is concerned her heart is as cold and hard as a stone. If it were in my power to move her, I should do all I could to help him, for he is certainly a noble young fellow."

The young man in the meantime had gone to his own room and seated himself in front of an open grate, leisurely smoking a cigar and watching the rings which were being drawn toward the fire. But his thoughts were with Cecelia, and he was trying to plan an interview with her. Her last act had excited his deepest admiration, and he would like to have told her how pleased he was with the spirit she had shown, but he was fully conscious that such a thing would only cause her displeasure. Why was it, he asked himself, now, as he had many times before, that he found such a charm in one who was such a mystery and

so wholly unlike other girls? If he must still be denied the privilege of speaking with her, he would watch her more closely in order to learn that secret charm which he hoped might eventually give him the key with which her heart was so closely locked.

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by the touch of skilful fingers on the piano in an adjoining parlor, and his attention was wholly taken up by the low, melodious sounds of a sweet accompaniment he had never heard before. He was trying to distinguish the air, when Cecelia's voice was heard in tones far sweeter than he had ever heard her sing on the stage. She was singing in a foreign tongue, which, after the closest attention, he discovered to be Latin. The piece was finished, and in silence he sat; not another sound reached his ear excepting her light footsteps as she crossed the room. Whether she went out or not he was not certain. He had been deeply touched by the words, or rather the air, and after fifteen minutes of silence he went to the parlor, hoping that she might have left her music on the piano, where he could find and translate it at leisure. To his surprise he found her at a window, deeply interested in a small book.

"Pardon me for intruding upon you, Miss Daton," he said, as she glanced at him, "but I supposed the parlor to be unoccupied."

She smiled slightly and said: "We are never sure of finding the public parlors of a hotel vacant, and I see no reason why one guest hasn't the same rights to them as another."

She had spoken thoughtlessly and expected him to take little heed of her words, but her smile had encouraged him to remain.

"Thank you, Miss Daton, for your unselfishness," he said. Standing by the piano now and lightly fingering the keys, he asked if she had seen the new cantata which the manager had thought of having produced in the early spring. She replied in the negative, and asked what it was. Her face told plainly that her interest was aroused, and glad that at last an opportunity had come for him to talk with her, he gave her a full description of the music.

"It must be very pretty," she said, when he had finished, "and ought to take well."

"I think it will, but of course a great deal depends on the singers."

She bowed her head in silence and turned her attention to some children who were playing in the snow outside.

"I heard you singing a few minutes ago," he said, "something entirely new, and I thought it very pretty."

"New to you, perhaps, but very old to me. It was one of the first things I learned in school. I was singing for my own amusement and did not suspect that I had a listener."

"I could not help listening, for, although I do not understand Latin well, I think the words to such an air must be beautiful."

"They certainly are," she quietly replied.

"Would you mind singing it just once for me?"

She hesitated, then, laying aside her book, went to the piano and sang in her sweetest tones the "Ave Maria Stella." When she had finished she turned to find his gaze fixed upon her in deepest admiration. It was evident that the words had affected him deeply, not so much on account of their beauty, for it would be long before he could learn to understand them, but on account of the way in which they had been sung. Her whole heart had gone into them and during their rendition she had been wholly oblivious to his presence.

"Thank you, Miss Daton, very much. I wish our manager could have heard that, for I know he would like to have you sing it."

"Not in public?"

"Yes in public. Why not? It would take well."

"Because there are things far too sacred to be presented before the cold, criticizing world, and that is one of them."

(To be Continued.)

In the enlightened mind, faith is a higher virtue than it can be for the ignorant, and to sustain it there is need of a nobler life.