

GIRLS.

THROUGH THORNY PATHS.

BY MARY ROWENA COTTER.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

I saw her at eve on the green knoll reclining. When Sol's setting splendor illumined the west, Her white taper fingers some flowers were entwining. In a wreath of green shamrocks that circled her breast; Her eyes were as bright as the blue sky above her. Her light golden ringlets did carelessly flow; Cold, cold was the heart that could see and not love her— The darling and pride of the vale of the Roe.

FRANCIS O'KANE.

Behind the green hills of Erin the sun was slowly sinking to rest at the close of a bright August day many years ago. One brilliant ray like a golden stream penetrated the stained glass window of a little church, falling upon the fair head of a girl of eighteen, or younger, who knelt near the altar, apparently deeply absorbed in prayer. From time to time, however, her eyes turned from the tabernacle towards the closed door of the sacristy. The fragrant odor of incense still lingered in the air, telling that Vespers was just over. With the exception of half a dozen old men and women, who were devoutly reciting the beads, the worshippers had departed. At last the sacristy door opened, and Agnes Conlin smiled at the cassocked figure of a handsome youth, apparently about her own age, though in truth he was four years older, appeared. He knelt in profound adoration before the altar, and then, as if impelled by one impulse, the two young people reverently made the sign of the cross, genuflected before the Blessed Sacrament, and walked together from the church. Soon after two old women who had watched them also left and paused outside to talk.

"How like an angel our Agnes looks," said one, "and were it not for lavin' her poor mother entirely alone, methinks she'd be joinin' the nuns. I once believed she'd be gone before Thomas was priested."

The other shook her head sadly. "I thought so myself once, for she's good enough to be in any convent, but I don't like the way she's been actin' since that stranger, bad luck to him, came here from America."

The only answer was a deep sigh from the first speaker, who had known Agnes' mother from infancy, for she, too, had noticed the sad change only a few short weeks had wrought in the girl who was as dear to her as her own.

"I don't mean to say," said the other, "that our Agnes ain't as good as she always was, but that stranger has turned her head, an' I am afraid she'll be after stalin' her away from us, an' he a Protestant, too, who laughs at her Church an' prayers when he pretends to her to think it's all right. I don't like him, an' it's meself wishes the unlucky day had never come that brought him here."

"I wish so, too, for I am afraid our poor little lamb has learned to love him too much for her own good, an' it may go hard with her when he leaves her, as he soon will. Fine ginnin' like him don't want the likes of her for a wife. I don't say she's not good enough for him, an' pretty enough, too, to be the wife of a lord, but she's not his kind."

"For her own swate sake as well as her mother's, I hope he'll soon be lavin' the country an' niver come back."

"It's meself hopes so too," said the other.

Agnes Conlin possessed a rare beauty such as is often found like a wild flower among the poorer classes and which even poets find hard to describe. On leaving the church she had removed her hat and tied it to her arm, thus revealing her golden hair, upon which the rays of the setting sun now fell. From the white oval face shone a pair of deep blue eyes, which beamed with love and kindness from the depths of a pure, innocent heart. From early childhood she had been known as an angel in the parish and many had been the blessings her sweet smiles and acts of kindness had called down upon her, especially among the poor

and aged, to whom she had ever proved a true friend.

The Conlins, unlike many of their neighbors, had always been in comfortable circumstances, and though far from wealthy, they had been looked upon as such by their less fortunate neighbors, who had never known what it was to be refused help by them. When Agnes was fifteen, she had experienced her first sorrow in the death of her dear father, and now lived alone with her mother and two brothers. Though she loved the boys with all the ardor of a most devoted sister, her affection was no less strong for her cousin Thomas, who had chosen to give himself up to the holy office of the priesthood, and he was now within less than a year of his ordination spending his last vacation of only a few short weeks at home.

Either intentionally or by accident as the two walked towards home, Agnes laid her hand on a book her cousin held, revealing a ring—a golden serpent entwined three times around her finger, with brilliant emeralds for eyes. At sight of the jewel Thomas exclaimed:

"Agnes, where did you get that horrible thing on your finger?"

She who had never known what it was to be angry with her cousin paused and looked at what she considered a rare gem of priceless value. Had any one else dared to speak thus she would have been strongly tempted to resent the insult, but Thomas could say to her what others dared not utter.

"I meant no offense, Agnes, but when I do not like a thing I cannot help sometimes showing it."

"Then you do not like my ring? Look at it closely, and see what a beautiful thing it is. Those are real emeralds. It cost a fortune!"

"I care not for its cost; it is a hedonistic thing and I do not like to see it on my little cousin's finger. But where did you get it?"

"It is my engagement ring," was the trembling reply, made in tones far less proud than they would have been a few minutes before.

"Agnes!"

There was sorrow and reproach in the speaker's voice. He stopped and pressed his hand to his heart, as if to still the wild beating of his words had caused. He looked into her face but for the first time in her life she shrank from the gaze she had always loved so well.

"Agnes, has it gone so far?"

She looked up, and seeing the same kind face she had always known (if anything it was far more tender) she found courage to say:

"Yes, Edward and I are engaged."

"Does your mother know, Agnes?"

"No; you are the first one I have told."

"Then I suppose Father James does not know either?"

"No," was the reply; "I felt afraid because—"

"Because you know that your old pastor, like a kind father that he has ever been to us all, would disapprove of your foolishness."

"I do not see how marrying a rich man could be called foolishness."

He saw what he had suspected, that his innocent cousin was so deeply infatuated that he must use the greatest caution in trying to reason with her, but he felt it his duty not only as a near friend and relative but as one who was soon to take up the work of the priesthood, to do all in his power to put an end to this foolish affair. Heeding not her answer, which cut him deeply, he said:

"Why have you not told your mother, Agnes?"

"Because I knew that the thought of parting with me, especially to let me go to America, would grieve her. But I will soon send for her and give her a home with me, where she can be a grand lady, wear silk and velvet every day and have servants to wait on her."

"Stop, Agnes, please stop! But tell me, was it in the agreement that your mother was to go with you?"

"No; but Edward has promised me that I shall be sole mistress of his grand home, for he has no mother, no sisters, and nobody to trouble me. So I intend to take my own dear mother to live with us."

"Vain hopes," he thought, "poor girl, how she has been deceived; but let us hope that it is not too late. It cannot be, for God will not allow it."

"Agnes," he said, in his tenderest tones, "since you have told neither your mother nor the priest of your

love affair, perhaps you can trust your cousin, who was your confidant from childhood."

She looked at him with a shadow of suspicion on her face, as if for the first time in her life she feared him, and was silent. He was already causing her to feel the evil of what she had done, but she did not wish to think of giving up her fond dream.

"Agnes, can you not trust me?"

Tears came to her eyes, but they were quickly dashed away, and she told him everything that had passed between herself and her lover.

At the age of twenty Edward Daton had graduated from college, with no living relative, himself the sole owner of a vast estate in Boston, consisting of much valuable land and many thousands in personal property. During the year which remained of his minority he stayed with his guardian, who was living in the old house where his parents had died; but no sooner had he come into possession of his property than his home suddenly became too small and selecting a site of about four acres on what was then the suburbs of the city, he had the foundations at once laid for a castle which was over a year in building. The progress of this beautiful structure was closely watched by many envious eyes, and not a few were the young society ladies who courted the acquaintance of the young master, not a few of them with a secret hope of being the lucky one who was to be queen of this domain.

Greatly to the disgust of some of the curious public, three sides of the grounds, one of which opened upon a cross street, were enclosed by a high stone wall, which was to be a permanent fixture. So the eyes of the stranger could not see the pretty little park with an artificial lake in the centre, which in due time was to be inhabited by fish and graceful swans who swam among the pond lilies. There were flower beds too, and among them statues of pagan deities. But the house itself, a mansion of brown stone, with columns of Scotch granite, stone steps and tiled verandas, with a pleasant little balcony here and there projecting from some of the upper stories, was to be seen by all. Only a few pretty flowering shrubs and rare shade trees were to obstruct the front view. The grounds were raised about three feet above the terrace, so as to give the place a more stately appearance.

Like most young men in his position, Edward Daton enjoyed immensely the gaieties of the social life to which he was readily admitted and for three years he went among his friends, treating the fair sex with great respect, but falling in love with none. He had penetrated their motives, and feeling that most, if not all, cared more for his wealth and beautiful home than for himself, he had resolved to marry none of them. His wife must be one who would never see her future home until she entered it a bride.

Life at last growing monotonous, he suddenly took his departure for a year's travel in Europe. He had resolved, if he could find on the other side of the Atlantic a woman he could truly love, that he would bring her home, no matter how poor she should be. No one here need know of her past, for his wealth would be enough to shield her from the effects of the sin of poverty which she might have suffered in the past.

In months of travel on the Continent and in England he had met but failed to be impressed by many fair ladies of the first families. To him they were all too much alike the gay butterflies of fashion he had left at home. In a secluded little country village he first found Agnes Conlin. Although a member of the Presbyterian Church, he seldom attended it and really held no firm belief in any religion, save that he had been taught to despise anything bearing the name Catholic. With a party of friends he had out of mere curiosity attended Mass in the little parish church, but after having visited many of the grand churches on the continent this seemed very plain to him, and he was wishing himself out of it when the Mass commenced. Early in the service his ear was charmed by a voice which sounded to him like that of an angel. Determined to know the singer, he made inquiries of a parishioner who proudly pointed out the pride of the parish just as she was leaving the church. If her voice had been angelic, her face was even more so, and he would not leave the place until he had made her acquaintance.

This was not difficult. He called on her two or three times in the early spring, then returned to England and tried to forget her. But he could not. Gradually the conviction stole upon him that she alone could grace his home, and he returned to win her. Wholly forgetting in her presence his resolution to keep his great wealth a secret from his future wife, he described his possessions in glowing terms, wherein she saw the realization of her youthful dream of a stately palace where she would be a grand lady. Her consent was easily won.

Agnes told her cousin all in the most glowing accents, vainly hoping that he who had ever been her truest friend and sympathizer in every joy and sorrow would rejoice with her in her good fortune. But as the light on her own face grew brighter, his became sadder.

"Thomas," she said at last, in a pitiful attempt to appear light-hearted, "you do not seem to be as pleased as you should be to learn of your little cousin's good luck."

"Good luck," he said sorrowfully. "I have never deceived you, Agnes, and I cannot now. If I were to tell you I approve of your choice, I would never cease to regret it, for I would grieve that I had taken part in encouraging you to enter into a union which can never bring you happiness."

"Cousin Thomas, this is not what I expected from you. I thought you would be glad to know that I was to be a grand lady and have plenty of money to help the poor."

"None would be more pleased than myself to see my little cousin a grand lady if she could become one with the blessing of God, but neither God nor society could approve the union you contemplate."

"Why not?" You are really cruel to speak thus."

"I only speak through a sense of duty to you and to Him to whom my own poor life is consecrated. Would it be right for one who hopes soon to be invested with the sacred office of the Catholic priesthood to encourage you to enter upon a marriage which the Church forbids? What would your father say if he could return from his grave to see his only daughter, the pet of his household, about to marry a Protestant? I fear he could hardly rest in his grave if he knew it. Not only that, dear Agnes, but your education, your early training and everything is against your entering the position which has been offered you. You, child, know nothing whatever of the demands of society upon its votaries, and I know it to be a life wholly unfitted to one brought up as you have been. Better let him go back and choose a wife from among his own in religion and social position, for if you do not, you will both have reason to bitterly regret it."

Thoughts of religion had hardly entered the girl's mind, for she had fully intended to go her own way and let him go his for the present, until the happy time when she hoped to convert him. And this she told her cousin. As for her mother, she emphatically declared that she could should go with her.

The sun had fallen to rest behind the hills and the moon was casting her silvery light over the landscape when at last the cousins arose from a rock on which they had been sitting. They had had a long confidential conversation, Agnes trying in every way to convince him that she was right and to win him over to not only approve of her engagement, but to intercede with her mother and the old parish priest on her behalf. But it was useless. He, on the other hand, used all his persuasive powers, explaining to her the demands of the Church and society until he had won her to a half-formed resolution to make the sacrifice he said God demanded of her.

Suddenly realizing that a heavy dew was falling upon the poorly protected shoulders of the girl, who had been in delicate health from infancy, Thomas suggested going home. A light cough was Agnes' reply, and her cousin chided himself for keeping her out so long. In rising she laid her hand in his for assistance, and the emeralds flashed in the moonlight.

"Agnes," he said, "by the faith of St. Patrick, who banished the snakes from Ireland, I wish you would take that one off your finger and send it back where it came from. It looks too much like an ill omen."

"I prize it very highly," said Agnes. "It is such an odd thing. Edward

paid a big price for it in Egypt and calls it Cleopatra's asp. But if you wish, I will give it back to him."

"It will be the wisest thing you can do, for, like her who chose a serpent as means of putting an end to her existence, you might find when too late that there is poison within its fangs for you."

Good resolutions are often easier made than kept, and love is blind, so it was not long ere Edward Daton succeeded in setting at naught the effects of all the kind advice Agnes had received from her cousin. After a long talk with the ardent lover, who was firmly determined not to give her up, she became blindly convinced that, shut up as he had been in the seminary for several years, Thomas knew nothing of human love and was incapable of advising her. She never once stopped to consider the great lessons in human nature which had taught the youth during the years of seclusion when he had been preparing for the great and holy work of saving souls.

In another week Thomas' vacation was over, and he was bidding goodbye to his friends, whom he hoped would next see him as a priest. Joyful indeed were the anticipations of that happy hour when in the little Church where he had been baptized he would offer up the living sacrifice of Calvary. But one dark cloud threw its shadow across his hitherto bright pathway when he thought of his dear little cousin, whom he felt now was lost forever. He would make one more effort to save her. Accordingly on the morning of his departure, as they were on their way home from Mass, he made a last solemn appeal. But she heeded it not.

"Only think," she said, of all the good I can do with the money I am to have. I intend to build a new church here and do a great deal more for charity."

"Do not be too sure of that, Agnes—you may be disappointed."

"No fear of it," was the reply, for Edward has promised to give me a large amount each year for myself."

The young man sighed as they neared his father's house, where Agnes was to remain until his departure but he said no more until he was about to bid her farewell.

"Poor Agnes," she said, as she laid in his hand her own, on which still glittered the serpent ring. "May God preserve you and keep you from all harm. I am leaving you now; will you not promise what I ask?"

"I am sorry, Thomas, but I cannot."

"Poor girl, I fear you may soon regret this. But remember one thing that I have always loved you as a sister, and as much as the man to whom you have given your heart has promised to do for you, I hope soon through God's grace to be able to do far more for you."

"What do you mean, Thomas?"

"Unworthy though I may be, I can remember you at the altar."

"And will you?"

"I certainly will when that happy hour of my life comes."

He bade her good-bye and a tear fell upon the serpent's head. Long after he had left her that ill-omened ring continually came before his vision, and many prayers for her rose heavenward. But the tidings that reached him a few weeks later made him feel that all was lost.

In September the old parish priest was called upon to marry Agnes to the stranger, and promptly refused but unfortunately Mrs. Conlin had been won over to her daughter's side for she was naturally a proud woman, and much as she dreaded the separation, she rejoiced in the hope of seeing her child rise in the world. She insisted upon having the priest perform the ceremony, and when they threatened to call on a Protestant minister, he at last reluctantly consented.

"Poor child," he thought, as he saw her carried away by her husband "far better would it be for her were she sleeping beside her father. It may be all right, but I fear that ere twelve months have passed her bright smile will have faded and she will awake to the terrible truth of what she has done. If I could only have given her the Church's blessing on her marriage it would not have been so hard."

Mrs. Conlin went back to her home feeling far more sad and lonely than she had anticipated, but she was kept up by the fruitless hope that Agnes might send for her. No mention was made of her coming in the bright letters from the absent one.

CHAPTER II.

Summer had come again and it was a glorious Sunday morning in July when, in the little Church where we first saw him, Thomas Conlin, robed in snowy vestments, stood at the altar to offer up the Holy Sacrifice. He wore a beautiful alb of handsome lace which had been sent to him by Agnes several weeks before his ordination, but he knew not that in having it made she had been obliged to use the greatest caution to hide the gift from her husband. The letter, or rather short note, sent with it was the only message he had received from her, and although she had claimed to be happy in her home, which had far surpassed her expectations, he was not to be deceived, and today while he prayed for all in his Mass, she was remembered particularly.

Never in the history of the little town had there been a greater day than this, and the Church was crowded to overflowing. But there was a gloom over the Conlin family. Agnes, who had faithfully promised when she went away, to be home for this happy day, had neither come nor sent an excuse. Her letters of late were becoming fewer and shorter, and it was now several weeks since she had been heard from. She was missed everywhere, but more especially by the choir. It was noticed by some that the young priest shed tears at the consecration, and some rightly guessed that these tears were for the absent one as well as in holy awe which filled his heart at the thought of the sublime act he was performing.

Father Conlin was given a short vacation of a few weeks at home, and everything was done to make his visit a pleasant one, but he missed the smiling face of his little cousin, as he always called her, and home to him was not what it had once been. If she had been laid away in the little family burial lot during his absence he would have had the consolation of knowing that she was safe, and could have offered up prayers at her grave; but oh, the cruel fate which had caused such a separation as this! He had promised to remember her at the altar and this he did daily. The autumn and part of the winter months he spent with his bishop, then asked and obtained permission to go as a missionary to America. It is needless to say that Agnes was not wholly absent from his thoughts when seeking this favor. The hope of soon seeing her and perhaps helping her in an hour of need made it easier for him to leave his home behind.

But how has it fared with Agnes since we last saw her? She left us a happy bride and she might have remained in happiness for many months had it not been for what her cousin feared most. Arriving at her new home she fairly went into ecstasies when her husband, after showing her through the house and grounds, told her she was mistress of it all. But her bright hopes began to fall when he told her that the select circle in which she was to move was strictly Protestant and she might as well give up her superstitions, and become a member of his church. This she refused to do, and he never succeeded in prevailing upon her to attend his church, though he kept her from her own. As he was in reality he thought it would look much better no church member himself, he was satisfied with this arrangement, although he thought it would look much better for her to go once in a while to the fashionable Presbyterian temple.

(To be Continued.)

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS' DAY.

June 8th has been designated as Christian Brothers' Day at the St. Louis Exposition. Delegates of the alumni associations of the Christian Brothers Colleges through the United States will meet in St. Louis on that date to effect a national federation. James E. King, secretary of the St. Louis Society, says that about one thousand delegates will be present. The programme for the day has not been entirely arranged, but the speakers so far are Bishop Hennessy of Wichita, Attorney Harry of Philadelphia, and Attorney Garrett W. McEmery of San Francisco.

CALENDAR.

serious facts about our country can begin with Friday or Monday. The can be used every 20 st people now get new r. October always be- day of the week as as July, September February, March and August always begin days from each other and nth in the year. The days of the year are year.—Exchange.