

# THE TWO COUSINS.

By MARY ROWENA COTTER.

## CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

This was very galling to the pride of the young man, who had lived in a pleasant home where there was plenty, but he would not humble himself to apply, for help to his parents knowing how severely they would censure him for his folly. Each day he sank lower, and several times when driven to madness by drink, he had beaten his young wife; but she had borne it patiently, hoping that he might reform. At last, on the day she came to the convent, the landlord came to demand his rent, which had not been paid for several weeks. Her husband, who was more than half intoxicated, very angrily informed him that he did not have wherewith to pay as he could get no work.

Many angry words followed, and the landlord threatened to put them out, but at the earnest entreaty of the young mother, who implored him to let them remain until to-morrow, when she would try to find shelter for her sick child, he left in a not very amiable mood. As soon as he was gone her husband very angrily demanded what she intended to do with the baby, and on being informed that she was going to try to have her cared for at an orphan asylum, until she could get work, he became more enraged than ever and said that no child of his should ever be taken to an orphan asylum.

In vain did she try to reason with him; but finally, after severely beating her, he turned her out without the child and bade her not return, saying he could take care of his daughter. In about an hour he left the house and stealing in the mother took her child and fled with her, wandering from street to street in constant dread of the police, of whom she had a horror, lest they might take her darling from her, or draw from her the story of her husband's cruelty, thus causing his arrest, finally, long after dark, she arrived, worn out with cold and fatigue, at the door of the convent, which she had never seen before, but feeling confident that she would find rest there, asked and obtained admission.

After telling her sad story the young woman said, "I will not trouble you much longer, Sister, for I shall soon be able to go to work and then all I ask is that you keep my baby a little while, and I will pay you for your trouble. I prefer leaving her with you because the Sisters were always so kind to me that I know she would be well cared for."

As she had promised, she did not trouble them much longer, for the most tender care failed to restore her to health, and in a short time she died, leaving her baby in the care of Sister Agnes Bernard, who had been the little one's constant attendant during an illness which at times promised to prove as fatal as the mother's. But a sadder fate awaited the child, for over the pretty blue eyes which had beamed so brightly, was falling a veil of darkness. All inquiries for the father and grandparents were fruitless, so the child was sent to the orphan asylum, and thither Sister Agnes Bernard was transferred in a short time.

"She is a beautiful child," said Alexia in conclusion, "and though we are all greatly attached to her we have often wished that some one who could give her a good home would adopt her; but," she added sadly, "it seems that no one cares to be troubled with a little blind girl."

"Poor child," said Mrs. Hurley, "it is too bad, but some charitable person may adopt her."

Virginia's interest in the orphan had become so deep that she forgot to resume the conversation which had been so unpleasant to her cousin and very happily did the hours glide away until she was ready to return home. Little Agnes had remained with Arthur the whole day, and he begged his mother to let his little sightless companion, who had both pleased and puzzled him, go home with him, but Virginia quieted him by telling him to wait until next time. In less than a week Agnes received two pretty dolls and a box of candy and fruit as a gift from Arthur; and Virginia, thinking she had done her duty, thought little more of the blind orphan, neither did she visit her cousin again.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Virginia's blissful married life continued a little over a year longer,

then in one short day and with scarcely a moment's warning, the sad climax came. In the early spring she had shed many tears over the newly made grave of her mother, and although it would be long ere she could recall the names of her parents without deep feeling of sorrow, the still light-hearted Virginia could not be unhappy as long as her husband and her darling boy remained.

It was the eighth anniversary of her marriage, and the usual reception was to be omitted on account of her mother's death. Unwilling to remain alone in the house of mourning, she went to the convent, and on what to them had always been such a happy day, Mr. and Mrs. Hurley, with about a dozen of their most intimate friends, had planned an excursion to a lake not far from the city.

It was a beautiful morning, and when they reached the lake, which was not over five miles wide, everything gave promise of a delightful day. About one o'clock a few fleecy clouds were seen over the lake, but little heed was paid to them, so after eating their dinner in the grove the party took two boats and started to cross the lake to visit some friends who were camping on the opposite shore. At first a gentle breeze almost carried the boats along and although the sun had disappeared behind a cloud, no danger was apprehended until when they were near the middle of the lake it commenced to rain and the wind drew stronger.

Virginia's heart beat with a vague fear that something was going to happen, and spoke of turning back, but as the wind carried them onward her husband told her that it would be safe to go ahead and he bent all his energies upon the oars. When a mile from the shore a sudden gust capsized the frail bark. Virginia had clung to her boy, and she knew nothing until she felt her husband's arms around her. "Never mind me, Robert," she said, thrusting the child into his arms. If you will only save Arthur I can take care of myself."

She felt herself drifting away and soon relapsed into unconsciousness. When she opened her eyes they rested upon the black habit she had once so despised, but when she saw beneath the white gathered band that covered her forehead the kind face of her cousin she felt that she was safe.

"Alexia," she asked, "how came I here in the convent?"

"You are not in the convent," said the Sister. You are in your own home."

"And how came you here?" asked Virginia, "I thought you nuns were never allowed to visit your relatives."

"They sent for me when you were first brought home," said Alexia.

"How kind of you to come, dear, Alexia, after I had remained away from you so long."

She paused and a wild, frightened expression came into her eyes as she added, "I remember it all now, Alexia, I remember it all now; tell me where Robert and my baby are. I must see them."

"Not now, Virginia," said her cousin, calmly controlling herself. "You are too weak and you must try to rest a little."

Virginia looked at her, but not a muscle of the calm, sweet face relaxed to betray the terrible truth she was hiding, and trusting that all might be well, she soon fell into a peaceful slumber, during which Sister Agnes Bernard and her companion, Sister Cecilia, watched in silent prayer, dreading the time when she would awake and they must tell her all.

Mr. Hurley had become so nearly exhausted in his efforts to row to the shore that little strength remained when he was thrown into the water; however, with only himself he might have reached the shore in safety, but with only one arm free, while with the other he tried to keep his half-drowned child above the water, he struggled bravely for some time, and had almost reached the shore when both sank to the bottom. It was nearly nightfall ere the bodies were recovered. Virginia and the other occupants of the boat had in the meantime been rescued and taken to their homes.

ams of tears she listened to the story told as gently as possible by Sister Agnes Bernard, and leaning on her arm she went to see the two corpses which were laid out in the parlor.

Untill the day of the funeral she spent most of her time with her beloved dead, leaving them only when coaxed away by her cousin, to whom she was becoming greatly attached.

Once when alone with her cousin, she threw her arms around her, and bursting into a passionate fit of weeping, said: "Dear Alexia, will you forgive me for all I said to you of the last time I visited you, for I am very sorry for it now."

"Forgive you Virginia; for myself I have nothing to forgive," said her cousin, "for though it grieved me sadly to hear the religious spoken of in such a manner, I was fully aware that it was because you knew us not, and I loved you too tenderly to take any offence."

"Thank you, Sister," said Virginia, deigning for the first time to address her cousin as a religious. I think I know you better now, and I am glad to see you still happy while I am a broken-hearted, childless widow. If you know not what it is to have a husband and child to love you, fortunately you will never know what it is to lose them." Here her tears flowed afresh and her cousin, instead of trying to soothe her, prayed that God might give her more strength to bear her loss.

For several days after the funeral Virginia remained in her own room, refusing to see any of her fashionable friends, who came to offer words of condolence, and never had she longed for the company of her cousin as much as she did now. When she thought how happy Alexia appeared to be in the place that once filled her with horror, she almost envied her and wished that she, too, might live in the convent. Not as a nun, oh, no; for Virginia Hurley was still too fond of her liberty and the world, nor even as a Catholic, for she could not think of submitting herself to a religion which in her blindness she believed to be so severe with its members. It was well enough for her religion retired cousin, but for her to feel that there was an obligation resting on her to attend church on Sundays, to abstain from meat on Fridays, and keep the other fasts as she had seen Alexia do, and worse still to humble herself to confess her sins to a priest, besides keeping other rules of which she was ignorant, but believed very difficult, it was too much. No, she could never do it.

All the bereaved young widow cared for was to find a place where, away from the world, her husband's friends and the pleasures in which she had participated with him, she might in a measure forget her sorrow. Accordingly one morning about three weeks after the funeral she went to visit her cousin and ask if she might remain a few weeks at the convent.

"I am so lonely at home," she said, "with no one but the servants to speak to, and although they are very kind to me, they cannot console me as you Sisters can."

Sister Agnes Bernard hesitated and looked at her cousin as if meditating upon how to answer her. Virginia continued: "Please do not send me away, Sister, ask your Superior if I may not remain here, for my home is so lonely that I cannot remain there alone and see everywhere sad reminders of them. It is so sad, dear cousin, she added, her tears flowing freely, and only one who has suffered as I have can realize what it is. It matters not what room I enter my eyes are sure to rest upon some treasure of Robert's, while in every part of the house I find my darling's toys where he left them."

"Sister Agnes Bernard, are you here?" asked a sweet childish voice, which seemed to vibrate with music. Virginia started at the sound, for it recalled another innocent voice which only a short time ago had been to her the sweetest of music, but was now stilled forever.

"Yes, dear, I am here," and the Sister stepping to the door led the child into the room saying, "This is our little Agnes whom you saw when you were here before."

lips and Agnes was not to be deceived. Choking a sob Virginia said, "Do you remember me, Agnes? I am Sister's cousin, Mrs. Hurley, who was here with my little boy a year ago."

"Yes, Mrs. Hurley, I remember you," said the child, "but why are you crying?"

"Because I have no little boy now," was the reply.

"Sister told me about it," said Agnes, "and I am so sorry for you; but Sister says he is happy with Jesus, and our blessed Mother in heaven."

"Yes," said Alexia, who was pleased to know that in spite of her indifference to religion, Virginia had not neglected to have the child baptized, "it ought to be consoling to know that your child is happy in heaven."

"But Sister," said Virginia sadly, "you know not what it is to be a mother, and can never realize what it is to lose an only child. If my darling could only have been spared it would not seem so hard, but what have I done that I must be bereaved thus?"

"I know it is very hard, Virginia," said her cousin, fixing her eyes upon the little girl whom she pressed closer to her bosom, "and I sincerely sympathize with you, but do you not know, did you ever stop to consider that others have been bereaved more than yourself?"

"What can be sadder," asked Virginia impatiently, "than to lose all who are dear to you without warning as I did?"

In the presence of the sensitive child, who, young as she was, had a keen intellect which had been intensified by the loss of her sight, the Sister dared not speak as she might otherwise have done, so pointing to Agnes she said, "Virginia, it is true you have lost a dear husband and dear child; but you have been left with a home and can care for yourself. Would it not have been much sadder had your child, instead of yourself survived that accident and been left to the care of strangers as others have?"

Virginia understood her, and laying her hand caressingly upon the golden curls of the blind orphan, who had thus been left among strangers, she said: "No, Alexia, I would not wish to leave him alone; but I have wished that I too might have been taken. I know it is wrong, but I could not help it."

"Yes, Virginia, it was wrong," said her cousin. "You should try to keep up your spirits, for God may have had some wise purpose in view in sparing your life and you know not what good you may be able to do."

At that moment Sister Agnes Bernard was called away and she bade little Agnes remain with her cousin until her return. The last words had sunk into her heart, and in deep meditation she silently gazed upon the golden curls, so like those upon which her eyes had often lovingly rested. She could not find voice to speak until addressed by the child, who said innocently, "I am so sorry for you, Mrs. Hurley, because your little boy is dead. I have heard Sister talk about you so much that I love you and I would like to be your little girl."

Virginia was startled by these words spoken in such childish innocence, and her heart went out more than ever to the orphan. Half an hour before she could not have believed that any child could ever again find a permanent place in her affections, but here was this orphan saying that she would like to be her little girl, while her cousin had just told her that she might be able to do some good.

"Would you really like to be my little girl?" Mrs. Hurley asked.

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply.

"And go home with me?" was Virginia's next question.

"Yes," said the child, then after a moment's hesitation, she added, "I would like to go, but I love Sister Agnes Bernard and the other Sisters so much that I do not wish to leave them."

"You cannot take them with you," said Virginia, but you might visit them often, and I know I could make you very happy in my home."

of good for her, or defray her expenses at an institution for the education of the blind. When her cousin returned she asked to be allowed to take Agnes home with her for a few weeks, and having obtained permission from the superior she gave up the thought of remaining at the convent, and late in the afternoon started for home with her.

Agnes being quite tired after her ten mile ride, Virginia spoke of her retiring soon after tea. After undressing her and putting on her little night robe as tenderly as she had done for her own child, she kissed her goodnight and was about to lead her to the bed when she said, "You have forgotten, Mrs. Hurley, that I have not said my night prayers."

A slight pang of reproach came into the heart of the proud woman, who never thought of saying her night prayers as she saw the sinless blind child kneel as reverently by her bedside as if she had been in a church. "May I say them aloud," she asked.

"Yes, dear," was the reply, and involuntarily Virginia knelt beside her. In a voice filled with sweet, childish plainness Agnes lisped the Lord's Prayer ending with "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from all evil, Amen," and was about to say the Hail Mary.

Virginia interrupted her saying, "You haven't said it all, dear."

"All of what, Mrs. Hurley," Agnes asked.

"All of the Lord's Prayer," was the reply. "You should say 'For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.'"

"Sister never taught me that," said the child in a mystified tone, "and I do not wish to say it."

"Very well," said Mrs. Hurley, not caring to dispute with a child, and thinking that it mattered little how her prayers were said. "Is that all?"

"Oh, no," said Agnes, and she commenced the Hail Mary.

Again she was interrupted by Virginia, who asked, "What is that you are saying?"

"The Hail Mary," was the reply, "don't you say it?"

"No, dear," replied Virginia, "but go on," and she did not interrupt her again but listened in amazement as the little one proceeded with the Apostles' Creed, Confiteor and Acts of Faith, Hope, Charity and Contrition.

When she had finished she reverently made the sign of the cross and arising from her knees she said, "How strange it is, Mrs. Hurley, that you do not know the Hail Mary."

"It is because I am not a Catholic," said Virginia, "and we always pray to God."

"And don't you ever ask His Blessed Mother for anything?" asked the child.

"No, dear," was the reply, "it is enough to pray to God."

"How strange," said Agnes, "I thought everybody prayed to the Blessed Virgin because she can help us so much."

Virginia cast upon her a glance of mingled amazement and pity, the first excited by such wisdom of a child so young, and the second by the thought that such marks of Romanism had thus early been instilled into her innocent breast; but she would say no more. But what was it she heard long after the sightless eyes had closed and she supposed her to have fallen into a peaceful slumber? "My dear mother Mary," lisped the sweet voice, "pray for Mrs. Hurley because I love her, and teach her to love you because I know she loves Jesus and Jesus loves you."

Whether she was awake or dreaming Virginia never knew, but that childish prayer was remembered long years after the child became, like her own darling, only a memory of the happy past.

Once more the sound of childish laughter and the merry voice of child hood rang through the lonely rooms of Mrs. Hurley's home, for little Agnes, who knew not what the light was, was not old enough to realize her affliction; and, although at times almost too serious for a child of her age, she was still as merry and light-hearted as the most brilliant of children. From the first Virginia almost felt at times as if her own child were with her again, and it seemed when she fully realized that he was gone, as if his spirit were there pleading for her to be kind to the orphan. As the days passed Agnes

winning ways increased Virginia's love for her, until at the end of a month she had resolved never to part with her. Like many others who had admired her beauty, Mrs. Hurley had been loath to take upon herself the responsibility of caring for a blind child; but that feeling was all gone now.

Once a week they visited the asylum and it was on the day of her fifth visit that Virginia told her plans to her cousin. Sister Agnes Bernard listened with a feeling of secret joy, for she had hoped that this would be the result of Agnes' visit. Endeavoring to hide her sentiments she said, "If you adopt her, Virginia, you must bring her up a Catholic. Do you think you can do it?"

"I know nothing of your religion myself," was the reply, "but Agnes is remarkably brilliant in the matter and knows more than could reasonably be expected of a child twice her age. My next door neighbors are Catholics and she has attended church with them every Sunday so I think with their help and a little assistance from you, I will have no difficulty in gratifying your wishes there."

Alexia had hardly expected that her cousin would thus quickly promise to comply with the one condition on which she had intended to intrust her little charge to her; but she knew that Virginia's word once given would be kept in spite of every difficulty, so with a light heart she hastened to tell the superior. A few days later Agnes Malloy became the adopted daughter of Mrs. Hurley. Not a little regret was felt at the asylum when it was learned that the child who, while her own life was spent in darkness, shed rays of sunshine upon all, was to return no more; but for her sake they were all glad when they learned of the beautiful home she had found.

(To be Continued.)

## RUSSIAN EMPEROR AND CATHOLIC PRELATES.

At a grand reception recently held by the Czar, two Catholic prelates, the Latin Archbishop of St. Petersburg and the Rector of the Catholic Academy, were present. Arriving at the Imperial palace before the end of the Mass, they stood near the chapel door waiting for the master of ceremonies to conduct them to their usual places, but no one took any notice of the two prelates. The Czar, leading the Cararina on his arm, came out, and finding his visitors standing behind the guards, showed plainly his surprise. Then leaving the Empress, the Czar advanced towards the prelates and shook hands with them. Some minutes later a colonel approached the Archbishop and his companion, made inquiries, and found out where the fault lay. Apologies were not long forthcoming.

The prelates were informed that the Czar was much put out at their being left in a place so unworthy of their sacerdotal character, and that he desired more respect should be shown to priests.

On the same day that this incident happened the Emperor conferred a decoration on Bishop Pallulon, of Kovno. The honor is the more marked because it is not the custom to bestow such favors on ecclesiastics except at Easter. During sixteen years Mgr. Pallulon was under suspicion and regarded at Court as an enemy of the empire. His virtue has triumphed at last over the malice of his persecutors. A new governor, recognizing the innate merit of the Catholic Bishop, brought the facts of the case under the notice of the Russian Minister of Worship, with the felicitous result above stated—Pittsburg Observer.

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