

Directory.

SOCIETY.—Established 1856, incorporated 1846. Meets in hall, 92 St. Alexander street Monday of the month. Rev. Director, Rev. P.P. President, Rev. C. J. Doherty, Rev. M.D.; Treasurer, B.C.L.; Secretary, Green; Correspondent, J. Kahala; Rev. J. P. Tansey.

T. A. AND B. SOCIETY.—Established 1856, incorporated 1846. Meets in hall, 92 St. Alexander street Monday of the month. Rev. Director, Rev. P.P. President, Rev. C. J. Doherty, Rev. M.D.; Treasurer, B.C.L.; Secretary, Green; Correspondent, J. Kahala; Rev. J. P. Tansey.

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THROUGH THORNY PATHS.

BY MARY ROWENA COTTER.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

"You are right, but it is our duty as women of a religious order who are criticized on every side to use the greatest prudence, especially in public and among strangers. I hope you do not think of approaching him."

"I would like to, Sister."

"Better not, Cecelia. Reverend mother would not approve it."

"For charity, Sister, do not object. I feel he would appreciate it."

On the impulse of the moment Cecelia was gone, and her companion looked sadly after her, filled with sad misgivings. She knew that the girl's motives were good, but what could excuse this act of disobedience on the part of a postulant so near the habit? And then she thought of the pretty, winning face and sweet voice which was too apt to attract the notice of strangers, especially of the opposite sex. Cecelia had acted contrary to her wishes and now she could only breathe a silent prayer.

Another deep, sad groan escaped the man as Cecelia stood over him, then she spoke what was intended as a word of consolation. A moment he was silent, then quickly his hands dropped from his face, he turned to her and springing to his feet stood looking straight into her eyes. The Sister, fearing that Cecelia had confronted a madman, hastened to her rescue. Cecelia was spellbound by the man's glance, and there was a responsive tenderness in her own eyes. To the Sister the man was a stranger he said, sadly and reproachfully by Allyn St. Clair.

Unheeding the presence of the stranger, he said, sadly and reproachfully:

"Cecelia Daton, how can you stand before me in your nunish robes and try to speak words of consolation to me after having broken my heart? I once believed you to be all that was good and true in woman, but in my mad love for you I made a sad mistake. The only woman who had a true heart was my own mother, but she is gone now, gone forever, and my confidence in woman is buried in her grave."

Cecelia dared not speak, but staggering into the arms of her companion, she looked into her face with an imploring expression, which bade her take her away. With folded arms and a hardened face the man stood looking after them as they went to a seat some distance away to await for the boarders, who soon assembled. When they formed in line and walked away he left the plot where his mother had rested for less than a week and followed at a distance, as if unwilling to lose sight of her whom he still loved until the door of the convent closed behind her.

"Lost, lost forever," he muttered, in bitter tones. "It was not enough to have my mother taken away so suddenly (Mrs. St. Clair had been ill but a day, but she who spurned my love must come to me in the detestable robes of a Catholic nun and mock my distress while pretending to give sympathy."

For fully half an hour he stood on the corner of the street opposite the convent, then walked up and down in front of the building for some time, but for what purpose he knew not. He was fully aware that there would be no chance of seeing Cecelia, but there seemed to be some strange comfort in gazing at the building which he knew sheltered her. He felt himself growing faint and weary, for he had taken scarcely any food and had been unable to sleep since his mother's death. The policeman on the beat passed him once or twice, eyeing him suspiciously, which was anything but pleasant to one of his sensitive nature.

Trembling violently from weakness he tried to walk to a car which would take him home, but reached the corner just in time to see one pass, and it would be fully ten minutes before another came. There was a large church on the corner, and he was about to sit down on the steps to wait for the car, when he noticed that the door was open, and, thinking that he would attract less attention inside, he entered. All was quiet here and had his mind been undisturbed he would have enjoyed

making a thorough examination of the interior of the vast edifice and its beautiful works of art. Such things had no charm for him now. All that occupied his mind was a vivid remembrance that the church in the far West where he had once heard Cecelia Daton sing was much like this. Dropping into a seat near the door he sat gazing fixedly on the little lamp which, in the midst of a costly array of cut glass, burned like a bright star before the altar. Now and then a devout worshiper would enter the edifice, kneel a few minutes in prayer and go away but he heeded them not, and the car he had come in to wait for was entirely forgotten. To him the church was growing dark (though the sunlight was streaming through the stained windows) until only the sanctuary lamp was visible, then that too, faded, and he was asleep.

In his dreams he thought that the air around him was suddenly laden with the sweetest perfume, and he heard many voices singing in tones more grand than anything he had ever heard before. Cecelia's voice arose loud and clear above them all, just as it had when he had heard her during Holy Week. But where were the singers? For some time he looked for them and at last he found them, a vast crowd in spotless white gathered around the altar. Their faces shone with a wonderful radiance, and all seemed so happy that he would have given all he possessed to have joined them, but a deep rushing stream rolled between which he could not cross. He approached the bank and stood looking wistfully across, fixing his gaze on one face—Cecelia's. She turned once and looked at him, then held a golden cross entwined with white lilies before her face and beckoned him to cross.

He made one effort, which failed, then formed a mad resolution not to go to her, but to bring her to him, heeding not the danger she must encounter. For a long time she firmly resisted, still holding the cross before her face, and he discovered that while she clung to that she was immovable. Picking up a stone he aimed it straight at the cross, crushing the lilies and striking it unbroken to her feet. She made one fruitless effort to recover her prize and in so doing slipped and fell into the stream.

"She is mine, now," he thought, "and I will rescue her." So saying he plunged in and tried to reach her, but her companions lifted her out. Her white garment was dripping with the muddy water, but strange to say, it was not stained. She gave him one look of sad reproach and then pointed to a man of noble appearance who hung ying upon a cross which he had not seen before.

The vision vanished and he felt something clutching him. Opening his eyes he looked to the left of the high altar and there beheld the same cross on which hung a life-size marble figure.

"Come," said a man's voice, "it is time to lock the church."

It was the sexton. St. Clair tried to rise but fell back in his seat. The sexton thought he had been drinking and would have called in an officer to help put him out, but one of the priests, an elderly man, who was walking up and down the aisle saying his Office, was now upon the scene, and bending over the youth he took his hand, saying:

"This man is quite ill."

Allyn looked gratefully into his face, but could not speak.

"He cannot remain here," said the sexton, rather impatiently, "for much as he loved and respected the priest, he felt that he often carried his charity too far."

"No, he cannot, so you must help bring him into the house."

Hospitality from one of the priests he had been taught to despise was something wholly unlooked for by Allyn St. Clair, and at any other time he would not have accepted it, but he was too weak now to resist and willingly permitted himself to be carried into the house and then to the infirmary nearby, where for many months he was tenderly cared for by the Christian Brothers and the priests.

Having been found in the church, it was supposed that he was a Catholic, and the priest, who saw that he was in all probability entering on a severe attack of illness, offered at

once to set his spiritual affairs aright. On learning that he had no religion, the good father did not mention the matter to him again until he was stronger. His rapidly increasing weakness caused his benefactors to fear that he would die, and while the inmates of the house took turns in caring for him, they daily besieged heaven with earnest prayers for his conversion. In even his weakest state the true nobility underlying his manly character had asserted itself, and the aged priest who had taken him in often declared that with the light of the true faith he would possess the power to do much good.

His caretakers soon learned that he was a singer by profession and alone in the world without a relative, his mother having recently died but for the rest nothing was revealed until he had fully recovered, when he told his good friend about Cecelia, hiding nothing of his love for her, and lingering longest on the scene in the cemetery and how he had followed her to the door of the convent. He had expected to be bitterly reprimanded for his folly, but the priest spoke only the gentlest words of reproach, after having explained to him the holy calling for which Cecelia had left all. The priest's words in regard to the excellence and holy purity of the life to which she aspired reminded him of his dream, and he told that in every detail. With the deepest interest the story was listened to, but no comment was made.

When Allyn was ready to face his departure his mind was filled with many anxious thoughts in regard to the darkness in which he had been educated, but this he would not tell, for he felt that perhaps the influence of kindness might have dulled his perception. He wanted time to recover his strength of mind as well as body and to think it all over by himself. He gladly accepted the "God bless you" extended as he took his departure, as well as the kind invitation to call again soon.

But how fared it in the meantime with Cecelia? Did she escape unscathed from the blow she had received or did she, like Allyn St. Clair, suffer a severe and purifying illness in atonement for her imprudence?

During the long walk home she scarcely spoke a word to her companion, for she was too full of humiliating thoughts of what she had done and of sympathy for him whom she had refused to marry. As far as she herself was concerned, she was glad of the strength she had shown in rejecting him, for she still felt strongly that marriage was not for her, but the time which should have been spent in prayer, was given to idle lamentations for him. She never suspected that he was following her home. The walk had given the others a keen appetite, but she could eat no supper and appeared to be ill. When asked by her superior if she were not well, she simply replied that she was quite tired, and was told to retire early so as to be refreshed for the retreat.

Cecelia thanked the kind superior and went away feeling that she might have done better had she told her all that had happened, but it was hard for her to bring herself to speak of it. She went to the chapel and prayed for a time, but no solace came to her troubled mind and she retired filled with remorse and bitter agony of heart. The next morning found no change. She entered upon her retreat with the others, but she was far from happy, and the words spoken in the opening instruction did not bring her any of the peace she had expected. In silence she prayed for comfort and grace to feel the sweetness of devotion which she had hoped the instructions would incite, but Allyn St. Clair's face was always before her, and she felt afraid even to lift her eyes to meet the penetrating gaze of the preacher. At the end of the second day, unable to bear her mental anxiety longer, she asked for a private interview with the priest and was left alone with him in the parlor.

He had noticed her in the chapel and knew that something was wrong. He was not surprised, therefore, when she threw herself upon her knees before him and burst into tears. He gave her his blessing and bade her arise and tell him what was troubling her, which she did with the

same clearness with which her would-be lover was to tell his story a few days later.

"Poor child," he said, "this is a most unfortunate affair, and I am sorry for you. Do you feel that you could care enough for this young man to marry him if you were not here?"

"No, father, I have no desire to marry. I feel that my place is here and I want the holy habit."

"But, child, if it should prove not to be your vocation, what then?"

"I have never thought of such a thing. I have no doubt whatever but that my vocation is in the convent."

"We are not always the best judges where we ourselves are concerned, so it is better to take counsel of one who is older and more experienced in these things."

"Who would that be, father?"

"Go to your reverend mother, give her your confidence and tell her all as you have told me. Then if she thinks you have not a vocation, it will be best to leave."

"It will be very hard, father, when I am so near the habit."

"It would be harder to take this important step and to learn afterwards that you had made a mistake. You would then have the greater humiliation of giving up the religious habit to return to the world," Cecelia did not reply, but her face was very sad.

"You should not be unhappy whatever may happen. If God wishes you bare, you will not be sent away; if He does not, you have no right to remain, for it would certainly be a grievous sin."

Cecelia turned away and hastened to obey the command, which was no easy task. The good father was not surprised when, a short time later, he learned that she had left the order and returned to her home. But he felt very sorry; he believed she had a true religious vocation. Still, there was something lacking.

At Cecelia's home preparations were being made to go to New York when a telegram was received telling them not to come; no more word came until the following day, when another message stated that Cecelia would be home on the evening train the day she was to receive the habit.

At the convent our young heroine was greatly missed, and many were the conjectures as to why she had left. Among her companions the truth remained a secret. At her own home there was great rejoicing by all excepting Aunt Nellie, who, while she had missed her niece, had been glad to see her give herself to God.

"It is no more than I expected," said Mrs. Daton, "and I hope my daughter will now know enough to appreciate her home and friends until she has a husband to take her to a home of her own."

Then when she was induced to go out in company, she knew that she was being stared at by many and pointed out to strangers as one who had left the convent, and she felt it keenly; but this humiliation was nothing compared to the remorse burning in her heart. After spending six months at home, during which she had kept up correspondence with the Sisters, she wrote and begged to be taken back, waiting patiently for the answer, which was long delayed, and when it did come, she was refused admission on the ground that she evidently had no vocation. The letter was kindly written, but very brief and to the point, which was not wholly pleasing to her.

To increase the trouble, in her mind was a continual remembrance of Allyn St. Clair and the scene in the cemetery. She yearned to know what had become of him, but earnestly prayed that he might never again cross her path. Her prayer was answered, for it was several years ere she heard of him again. In the winter the Clintons came to the city, but he was not with them. The manager, who called upon her as an act of courtesy, stated that St. Clair had left the company several months before on the death of his mother, promising soon to return, but he had failed to do so and could not be found. Even his most intimate friends at home only knew that a few weeks after his mother's death he had made a public sale of his household goods and gone away.

Maurice Carroll, who had accumulated quite a fortune of his own in buying and selling Western land, was now home to remain, and no more welcome visitor than he was entertained at Innisfallen. In Cecelia's presence Mrs. Daton now never referred to the hope she had entertained of making Maurice her son-in-law, and as he appeared to be a friend of the family rather than of herself, in particular, Cecelia saw no reason for not trying to make the hours spent at her home pleasant, her only precaution being never to remain alone with him. On two or three occasions when he had invited Cecelia and Agnes to attend the theatre with him, Cecelia had accepted, and had also permitted him to be her escort to supper at a few parties, thinking no more of the matter than she would of going with a relative.

One evening just before Christmas Cecelia was alone with her grandmother, the other ladies having gone out to attend a lecture, when Mr. Carroll was announced. Cecelia asked the old lady to accompany her to the parlor, but thinking that the young people could get along better without her, she declined.

"Please do come down, grandma," she said, "for I feel very dull to-night and cannot entertain him alone."

Mrs. Daton smiled, thinking how different Cecelia was from most young ladies to whom the presence of an elderly person is usually a bore when their gentlemen friends call, but then Cecelia never was like other girls, and the old lady promised to be down in a few minutes, a promise which she regretted as soon as the young girl was gone. After putting a few touches to her rather disordered toilette, she sat down for half an hour, then went to keep her promise, feeling that she was about to intrude. As she neared the door she heard Maurice's voice in low, earnest tones, but could not understand a word. Very cautiously she advanced until she stood half concealed behind the portieres hanging over the opening leading to the hall; then she beheld a sight which caused her to smile and glide noiselessly back to her room, thankful that she had shown wisdom enough not to go to the parlor with Cecelia.

Finding himself at last alone with her whom he loved, Maurice would not let this golden opportunity pass without seeking some return for the affection so long entertained in silence. Drawing his chair close to her he made his avowal, to which she was obliged to listen, when she would gladly have flown from the room. Her eyes were fixed upon the carpet and she never once raised them, while her heart beat violently. It was at this point grandmother looked in and retreated so well satisfied.

"Too late, too late," seemed to sound in her ears, and she wept bitterly until sleep came to her relief.

"Now, Cecelia," he said in conclusion, "can you not give me the love for which I have waited so long and promise to become my wife?"

"As a friend I have always esteemed and respected you, but I cannot marry you."

"Surely you cannot mean it, Cecelia!"

"I do mean it, Mr. Carroll. I am not one to say one thing and mean another."

"You are very cruel; but perhaps you think that one who has failed in an effort to become a nun has no right to marry."

"Such things may appear a little strange to those who do not understand. I see no serious objection to such a person afterwards marrying if she feels that she is called to it by God. I am not afraid to speak plainly to you of the matter, for I feel that one of your education can understand."

"I think, Cecelia, that I comprehend your meaning, and you would have me understand that you have no objection to me, but you feel that you are not called by God to marriage."

"Exactly so," she said.

"Cecelia, if I could be convinced of this, much as I have loved you I would be content to give you up. But I fear you do not know your own mind. Would it not be better to wait a little longer before you say the final 'No' which both of us might regret all through life."

"My decision is final, I cannot change it."

"Perhaps," he said, "I have been a little hasty in asking you to promise to marry me so soon after your leaving the convent."

"I have been outside long enough now to decide, and I feel that if there could be any change in me it would have come before this."

He saw that she was immovable this evening and decided to bide his time, allowing her opportunity to forget the days spent in the convent. On one thing he was resolved, and that was to speak to her father on the subject without delay.

"Cecelia," he said, "you have tried to discourage my love, but I tell you frankly that I cannot be so easily persuaded to give up all hope."

"How early Mr. Carroll has gone," said grandma, who went to meet Cecelia as she came up stairs. Mrs. Daton was a little disappointed at the absence of the happy expression she had expected to find on Cecelia's face.

"Yes, grandma, it is quite early, but you could not expect him to remain late when there was no one to entertain him but myself?"

"Are you not enough to help him spend a pleasant evening?"

Cecelia only smiled and said:

"Grandma, why did you not come down to the parlor as you promised?"

"Because I thought young people would be happier without an old woman like me."

"If I had not really wanted you, grandma, I should not have invited you down."

"Our guests are to be considered as well as ourselves," she said with a meaningful smile. Grandmother was curious to know if there was any significance in what she had witnessed, but she did not wish Cecelia to know that she had been so near and gone back to her room.

Acting upon his resolution, Mr. Carroll called upon Mr. Daton and was pleased to learn that he was held in the highest esteem by the family, who would most gladly welcome him to their home as one of their number. He promised to do all in his power to win Cecelia's consent to the marriage.

"Do you think you can change her?" asked the ardent lover.

"I think I can," said Mr. Daton, "for Cecelia has ever been a good and dutiful daughter, and when she knows her father wishes her to marry you I think you will not find her hard to win."

"Thank you with all my heart," said the young man, "and when we are married I shall feel that I am doubly blessed in having so good a father-in-law as well as the loveliest of wives."

(To be Continued.)

CHAPTER IX.

"No more than might have been expected," was the verdict not only of Mrs. Daton, but many of her friends, and Cecelia, who was looked upon as having taken one very foolish step in life, which she had wisely regretted ere it was too late, was gladly welcomed back to her place in society. Many invitations to attend social gatherings poured in upon her as soon as it was known that she was at home to stay, and to please the members of her own household she had to accept them with good grace and go in spite of her own wishes.

It is almost needless to say that Cecelia was far more unhappy now than she had ever been at home before. She fully appreciated the love of her own and all that was done for her, but having tasted the joys of a far purer, holier life which is to the true religious only a beginning of the bliss to be enjoyed throughout a happy eternity, she found it hard to be content with her present life. The first night spent at home a dread homesickness took possession of her, and she would gladly have sacrificed everything the world could have offered her to be back again in the poor little room where there was none of the glitter and luxury that surrounded her here.

"Too late, too late," seemed to sound in her ears, and she wept bitterly until sleep came to her relief.

The cheapest municipal tenements are those owned by Dublin where two rooms can be rented for 50 cents a week.