

# THROUGH THORNY PATHS.

BY MARY ROWENA COTTER.

## CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

In the morning it was apparent to the nurse that Grace was really ill, and a physician was sent for at once. who announced the startling fact that not only she, but her sister had the scarlet fever, of which there were already many severe cases in the city. The symptoms were not very alarming as yet, but to the trained nurse whom he sent to the house that day he remarked that it would have been much better for the younger child had he been called the evening before, when she had first been taken ill. Secretly he had serious fears for her, as she had never been a strong child.

In the excitement and anxiety concerning the girls Edward was for a time forgotten and wandered about the house at will. Later he was taken in charge by the family nurse, with whom he dined in the kitchen, and so heartily did he partake of the meal, especially a large frosted cake, which the servants had reserved for themselves, that there was no fear entertained for him. When his own appetite had been satisfied he thought of his little sisters, with whom he wished to share his feast, but the nurse objected, explaining that the children were sick in bed and he could not go near them. Child-like he rebelled and insisted upon going, but was soon pacified by being presented with a tiny sail boat made by one of the men. Later the nurse was called away temporarily and Edward was left unguarded in the kitchen. No one noticed when he slipped out, and he was not missed for two hours. He had finally been remembered, and the nurse had been instructed to prepare him for removal from the infected house. But he could not be found.

A thorough search of the house was made, then they went to look for him in the grounds and outbuildings. The searchers were about to give up in despair, when the little boat was discovered riding gracefully on the waves of the artificial lake, which for years had been the pride of the place. A terrible fear took possession of the household. The surface of the water was scanned, but only the pond lilies and a flock of graceful swans could be seen. The only thing that disturbed the glass-like surface of the water was the flapping of the birds' wings and the falling of the spray from the fountain in the centre. One of the men servants entered a boat and slowly rowed out, his eyes sweeping the bottom of the lake. Near the fountain the rower dropped his oars and turned deathly pale, his face revealing more plainly than words the fact that the object of his search had been found. The child had probably floated over to the fountain, where he had been drawn in and held by the current. The little boat was promptly brought to the surface, but life was extinct. As they brought him to the shore his father, who had been searching in another direction, and had just reached the spot, stood for a moment in speechless grief and horror, and then seized the dripping form of his darling and ran to the house. Hoping against hope, the agonized father summoned a physician, only to be told that the child was beyond human agency. The doctor took upon himself the task of notifying the now doubly stricken mother. On receipt of the dread tidings tired nature succumbed and she relapsed into unconsciousness.

Her first thoughts on recovering and fully realizing the true state of things were of her sister, whom she had so cruelly treated. No one else could have any power to console her now in this the beginning of the first great sorrow she had known since her mother's death, but the one who she had forsaken in the hour of prosperity could not be with her at the hour of need.

Nellie had married three years before and had gone to a distant city to live. Like her visits when living in the same city with her, Cecelia's letters had been short and far between, but the ever loving sister had borne the slight with patient resignation, making all manner of excuses for the negligent one. Had it been possible Nellie, in response to a message from Mr. Daton, would have left her own husband and pleasant home to hasten to the house of sorrow, but both herself and her week-old baby had to be considered, so the message was wisely withheld by her husband. He sent back apologies saying that it would be impossible for his wife to leave home and telling of the lit-

tle girl who had been baptized Agnes in honor of her cousin.

The elder Mrs. Daton, instead of trying to console the afflicted mother shut herself up in her own room, weeping and moaning over the terrible death of her little grandson, but refusing to see him until he had been laid in the little white casket. Then she went down to the parlor and condescended to put her arm around her daughter in law as she gazed upon the angelic little face. She found it much easier to give directions for the decoration of the room with flowers than to console the afflicted mother. She took upon herself all the arrangements for the funeral until it was suggested to take the child to the Catholic Church; then she rebelled, saying that it was all nonsense to take so young a child to a public church. If they must have a priest, who could not place the child any higher in heaven than he was, why not have him come to the house, where only their own set would be expected to attend the funeral? "Mother," was Mr. Daton's reply, "you once objected to having a priest come here to perform an important ceremony, namely, my marriage, and I will not bring one here now for the funeral of my child. If my wife desired it, I might do it, for this is her home, and she has a right to do as she pleases, but it is her wish, and consequently mine, that the funeral be held in the church. Besides, mother, I would not wish to have a funeral here, with two more children dying in the house."

When the question of interment arose, Cecelia thought of a pretty spot in the Catholic cemetery, where, to her credit, she had since her marriage erected a costly monument over the graves of her own parents. She wished to put her boy there, so as to have him in consecrated ground, but for the first time in her life her husband objected to her plans; his family could rest no where but in the family vault of the Datons; so near his Catholic mother the Catholic child of Edward Daton was laid to rest.

But how fared it with the two little girls? Several times had little Agnes called for her brother, but his death was kept a secret from her, and she was told that brother could not come to them until they were well, as it was feared he, too, might get sick. But from the first Grace was ill to ill to care for anything, and in a short time she knew no one so grave fears were entertained for her. It was a most bitter trial for the parents to be obliged to go to Agnes, as they did many times during the day, and hear her prattle of Eddie. Then when her grandmother had remained in her own room for two days, refusing to visit the little invalid, who loved her most tenderly, she asked if grandma, too, were afraid of getting sick, and when assured to the contrary, she wanted to know why she didn't come to see her little girls. She always included Grace, and could not understand why the little sister who occupied a bed in the same room did not talk to her.

On the afternoon of the funeral the nurse went down stairs for a few minutes and, thinking her charges were safe, waited to see the procession leave the house. Agnes heard the many footsteps in the front hall and on the veranda, and wondered what it all meant. Suddenly an idea occurred to her; she was very weak, but summoning her strength she left her bed and ran to the window. She was obliged to lean on the casing to keep from falling, but she saw all, the first thing that met her gaze being the little white casket borne down the broad walk, followed by her parents and grandmother in deep mourning. Young as she was she understood, and could not move from the spot even after the funeral cortege had passed from view. The nurse on returning found her standing there but had not the heart to chide her for leaving her bed. Instead she took her in her arms, gently carried her back and bent over to kiss her, but Agnes repulsed her, saying:

"You are a bad woman, and I do not like you any more because you let them take my little brother away without letting me see him."

"Your brother is in heaven darling," said the nurse, who knew that she could deceive her no longer, "but if you are a good girl you will be with him there some time."

"I know he is in heaven and I am

going to him soon. But why didn't you take me down to see him before they took him away?"

"Because you were too sick, darling, and we did not wish to tell you until you were well."

"But I may never get well. I may die like him, and then you will be sorry you did not let me see him."

"No, darling, you will not die like him. You must try to keep quiet and be a good girl so that you will get well. Your mamma cannot spare you now that Eddie is gone."

"If God wants me in heaven, He will take me like He did Eddie, and mamma or nobody can keep me."

The nurse was silent; she saw that the child had become greatly excited and that she must use the greatest caution with her. It was certainly an unfortunate thing that she had left her alone at such a critical moment and she could not forgive herself for it. The idea of a story, which never failed to interest the little girl, occurred to her, but for the first time it would not do. Agnes insisted upon talking about her brother and heaven.

With all of a mother's tenderest care Cecelia now turned her attention to her little girls and refused to leave the room, but neither her watchfulness nor the skill of the physician and nurse could save them. Agnes was growing rapidly worse, and it was pitiful when her mind gave way to hear her constantly talking about her little brother who had been taken away from her. She would permit no one but her parents and grandmother to do anything for her. The nurse she would not allow near her.

Things went on in this way for nearly a week and then all was over. The two little sisters had fallen into the sleep of death within a few hours of each other. Nellie, who had received no word of the little girls' death, wrote her sister a long and consoling letter, telling how it had grieved her to hear of Eddie's loss, and finished by giving a glowing description of her own bright baby. The letter, instead of having the desired effect, only served to make Cecelia, now childless, all the sadder.

"What have I done," moaned the wretched woman, "to merit such a punishment? It was not enough for me to lose all three of my darlings at once, but I must be told in this lonely hour that my sister has a baby to love. It almost seems that God was unjust in taking them all, when I had plenty to bring them up well, while she is poor."

To her credit when she wrote to Nellie of her second great loss, she enclosed for baby a check for one hundred dollars as a present in memory of the little Agnes who was gone. The money was gratefully received, for it was a large sum in the eyes of the poor young people who had so recently commenced life together, but it was all put away for Agnes.

## CHAPTER XI.

After a lapse of seven years and a half we once again meet the Datons. Time had softened the sorrow from which we last saw them suffering but still the parents continue to mourn for the little ones, and when Cecelia sees the children of her friends just beginning to develop into manhood or womanhood she cannot help thinking sadly of her own. The blow, while it had softened her nature, giving her a deeper affection for her own than before, had failed to stifle her pride. No sooner had the set time of mourning for her darlings elapsed than her grand home had once more been thrown open and she had returned to the gay social life which seemed so fitted to her naturally bright disposition, and with such apparent interest did she enter upon it that many thought she felt far too lightly her terrible loss.

The light patter of merry childish feet once more resounded through the great rooms of the mansion, and doubtless this had much to do with Mrs. Daton's returning spirits. But there was only one child now to command the love of the entire household, and command it she did, for little Cecelia was a most remarkable girl, a sweet character whom few understood, but everybody loved. In form and feature she was very much like her eldest sister, also her Irish grandmother, but she had her own mother's wavy raven hair and sparkling dark eyes. Every one agreed that Cecelia was a beautiful child and hers was a rare beauty which

would increase rather than diminish as she grew older.

It had only been a few months after the marble slab had sealed the resting place of the first children that Cecelia had been sent to fill their places. She was delicate, and it was feared for many weeks that she had been sent only to make herself loved for a time and then to go away with the others. At her baptism, in an hour of anxious forboding that she might lose her, the mother begged God to spare this one and had solemnly consecrated her to His Immaculate Mother. Her prayer was answered, and though God would have her for Himself, she was spared to perform a noble mission in life. As the weeks passed she grew stronger, and when she was able to take her first steps she was a healthy child.

Now we find her a bright little Miss who is to celebrate her seventh birthday to-morrow, and in childish glee she stands before a long mirror proudly surveying the effects of a garnet silk dress covered with white gauze which she is to wear at her party.

"It is so pretty, mamma, and I like it better than the blue and white I have always had to wear."

"Yes, darling, it is very becoming," said the proud mother, drawing her to her side and kissing a dimple on her fair white cheek, "My little girl does look perfectly lovely."

"Why did you never let me wear red before, mamma?"

"Because you were consecrated to the Blessed Virgin and had to wear her colors, blue and white, until you were seven years old."

"How nice that was, mamma, to be consecrated to the Blessed Virgin! Then I really was her little girl?"

"Yes dear, you were."

"And won't I belong to her any more now if I take off her colors?"

"Certainly you will, child; if you are a good girl you will belong to her all your life. But why do you ask?"

Cecelia cast one wistful look at her pretty red dress and said:

"Because, mamma, if I would not belong to her after I took off her colors, I'd rather keep them on all ways."

"You were only to wear them until you were seven, and now your time is up and you are allowed to wear any color you wish."

The little girl's face brightened, for she had often envied her young friends the bright colors she had seen them wear, but she had never before thought to ask why she did not wear them, and her mother thought best not to tell her, as she was too young to understand.

"Mamma, may I go and show grandma my new dress?"

"Certainly, darling, if you wish. You will find her in her room, I think."

Mrs. Daton listened with a happy smile to the fairy tread of the little feet, then, as if impelled by some strange impulse she could not understand, she silently followed and hid herself just outside the door. The pet of the household had sprung into the ever wide open arms of the elderly lady, kissed her lovingly, and then stood back from her, asking her how she liked her new dress.

"Very pretty, pet, very pretty," was the reply, "I never saw my little girl look so well. Strange mamma never thought of putting red on you before, when it is so becoming to that lovely brunette complexion!"

"It was because I was consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, grandma, and had to wear blue and white. They are her colors, you know."

"What?" exclaimed the lady, in mingled disgust and dismay. "I do not understand. Please explain, child."

"I cannot explain, grandma; that was all mamma told me, but I thought you ought to understand. You are older than mamma."

"Yes, darling, true I am older than your mother, but she does many strange things which grandma cannot understand."

"But they are right grandma, I know they are, for mamma never does anything wrong."

"Not consciously, darling, not consciously, I hope, though I cannot understand all she does."

Through the crack of the door Mrs. Daton could see clearly without being seen, and the expression of the face of her mother-in-law caused her to feel like grasping her child and fleeing forever from the woman's presence. It was only one of the sad

marks found in a divided household where there is no unity of faith. It was plainly evident that Mrs. Daton loved her little grandchild almost to idolatry, but her face revealed to the watcher that she believed the innocent child was being misled by an erring mother, who would bring her to ruin. What was she to do, reveal her presence and take her pet away from this bad influence or wait and see if anything worse was said? She felt that to do the first might cause ill-feeling which she dreaded, especially from this woman, whom she had always scrupulously endeavored to please.

"Grandma," asked Cecelia, looking straight into her face, whose expression she did not like, "don't you love the Blessed Virgin?"

"Why should I, darling, when I know nothing of her?"

"Oh, grandma, you don't mean it. Don't you know anything about God?"

"Certainly, child; I am a Christian and of course I know all about God."

"If you do, you ought to know something about His Mother."

"It is enough to know God and serve Him, without worshipping His Mother or any other woman."

"I love her just the same, grandma, and I know you will when I tell you all about her, which I intend to do some time when I learn more."

"Poor, deluded baby," thought the grandmother; "it is too bad, but she is no child of mine and I can do nothing for her. When she gets older and can understand she will know better, and if her intellect develops as it promises to now, she will never submit to the errors of Romanism."

Little Cecelia in the meantime was buried in deep thought, but suddenly, the mist clearing away, her face brightened and she said:

"I will say a Hail Mary every day for you that the Blessed Virgin may teach you to know and love her."

"And I will say the Lord's Prayer every day for my little Cecelia that God may make her a good girl and teach her to know and love Him as she should."

The compact was sealed by a loving hug and kiss, and, contrary to expectations of the woman listening at the door, it was kept for years. Little in reality could be expected from a child of seven, while no more might justly be looked for from the woman of the world, whose religion consisted chiefly in being a member of a fashionable church.

Warned that the danger was now passed and not wishing to be discovered, Mrs. Daton stole back to her room as noiselessly as she had come. She had always known her child to be possessed of a brilliant intellect far beyond her years, but her words to her grandmother revealed her in a new light, which convinced the mother that the days of innocent babyhood were for Cecelia really a thing of the past. She buried her face in her jewelled hands and sat reflecting on her child. She longed for some one to talk to about her pet, and naturally her mind turned to the one who should be a married woman's truest friend and confidant, namely her husband; but here another glaring proof of the sorrows of a divided household stood out before her. She could talk with him on the physical comforts of Cecelia or of her pretty clothes, in which, proud father that he was, he was always interested, but on this subject that touched the very core of her heart she must be silent. So absorbed was she that she did not hear the light footsteps until two little hands encircled her wrists.

"What is the matter, mamma? You look as if you felt badly about something."

"Nothing, my precious pet, nothing—I was only thinking."

"Thinking about what, mamma?"

"Only my own dear little girl."

"Does it make you sad to think of me?"

"No, child; no indeed; why do you ask so strange a question?" and the mother's face was now all smiles.

"Nothing makes me happier than to think of you, my own little darling."

"Mamma, dear, you did look sad, but maybe it was your other little girls in heaven you were thinking of and I thought it was me."

"How well you guessed it," said the mother, glad of any excuse.

"I wish," said Cecelia sorrowfully, "that God has left me just one, so I could have somebody to play with. I get so lonesome sometimes."

"I wish so too, pet, but God knows

best, and they are safe from harm."

"Mamma, I wish you would take this dress off. I must not wear it to-day."

"Don't you want to keep it on just until papa comes, it is so pretty?"

"No, mamma; to-morrow will be time enough for him to see it. If he saw it he might ask me questions like grandma did, then if I told him I had been consecrated to the Blessed Virgin and he said he did not believe in her, it would make me feel, oh, so badly."

"Poor grandma does not understand pet; but if she did she would love the Blessed Virgin as well as we do; but come, take off the dress if you wish."

"Yes, mamma, for if this is the last day I am to wear the Blessed Virgin's colors, I want to keep them on as long as I can."

A little blue cambric dress which had been discarded was quickly donned again, and like a singing bird Cecelia flew away. Down stairs she went singing a few words of a hymn to the Blessed Mother of God and out to the little grotto of Lourdes, which had been a sacred spot to her from the dawn of reason. She went from one flower bed to another, picking choice buds, but instead of taking the gay red and yellow blossoms she had always admired, she selected only blue and white, for now that she had been told that these were Mary's colors, she would offer her nothing else. The flowers of brighter hue which she herself had placed on the shrine the day before were carefully picked out and thrown away now, not even a green leaf being permitted to remain. When all was done Cecelia looked over her work with an air of satisfaction, then knelt down to pray.

In the prayers said in whispered accents she first recommended herself to the heavenly Queen, telling how she was taking off her colors to-morrow and begging her always to watch over her and keep her for her own little girl; then she prayed for her grandmother, saying the Hail Mary she had promised, and lastly, as if suddenly struck by a brilliant idea, she asked for a little sister to play with.

The mother in the meantime sat in reflection deeper than that in which her child had found her. Cecelia had told her what she needed, and in her heart she was strongly tempted to rebel against God for having robbed her child before her birth of the companions she should now have had. Once her mind turned to her only sister, from whom, through her own carelessness, she had not heard in four years, Nellie at that time being the happy mother of two boys, and she thought as she had once before in an hour of:

"God has given children to her who scarcely has means to provide properly for one, but I, who have abundance, am doomed to bring up my one child without companionship. It is unjust." And she bowed her head in despair instead of thanking God that her darlings were safe in heaven, where no harm or suffering could ever reach them.

To be Continued.)

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