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Through Thorny Paths.

BY MARY ROWENA COTTER.

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(Continued from last week.)
PART FIRST.
CHAPTER I.

She looked at him with a shadow of suspicion on her face as if 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 to full 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 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 eye of a 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 balcony 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 ground was raised about three feet above the terrace, so as to give the place a more stately appearance.

Like most young men in the 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 grew 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 might 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 profligacy 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 all were too much like the gay butterflies of fashion he 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 three or four 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 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 of 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 such with the blessings 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 yourself 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 could he 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 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 were 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 in 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 emerald

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 of your fingers 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 a Cleopatra's sapphire. 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 a 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 getting to 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 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 good-bye to his friends, whom he hoped would next see him as a priest. Joyful indeed were the anticipations for 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, then trust all to God. 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 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," he said as she laid in his hand her own, on which still glittered the serpent ring. "May God preserve you and keep you from harm. I am leaving you now; will you not promise that what I asked?"

"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 do far more for you."

"What do you mean, Thomas?"

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

"And you will?"

"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 mental 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 if she were 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 seem so hard."

Mrs. Conlin went back to her home feeling far more sad and lonely than she had anticipated. She was now

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.
(To be continued.)



Five Minute Sermon.

THE PARABLE OF THE SNEED.

To believe in Jesus Christ, to hear His words and understand the significance of His wonderful works, the divine gift of grace is first of all necessary. Even St. Peter could not have recognized in him the Son of the living God if it had not been revealed to him. Besides the divine grace there is also necessary a docile heart, a sincere mind, and an ardent desire to be enlightened in the things necessary for gaining eternal life. Now, among the multitude that collected about Our Lord to hear His words and witness His miracles there were but few who had these necessary conditions; there were on the contrary, many who opposed Him and refused to yield to the many proofs He continually gave of His mission and His divine nature. When therefore He said, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear, He meant to say: He who is faithful to the grace he receives, and hears Me with a sincere mind and upright heart, will understand the meaning of My parables and the salutary significance of My words.

In reading St. Matthew the words of Jesus Christ: "that he spoke in parables that they might not understand Him" are easily understood: they mean that in thus speaking Jesus Christ wished to say, not indeed that He spoke in parables that they might not understand Him, but that many, because of their bad motives and blind passions, saw the wonders worked by Him and heard his words, but did not understand the meaning of His teaching. Observe that the merit of the Christian depends on faith; that in view of this fact Christ does not force the intellect by a powerful conviction, but only submits to it abundant motives to win our meritorious belief; and that all those who permitted themselves to be led by the spirit of God, who yielded to divine grace, heard Him willingly and believed His words, while those who permitted themselves to be led by the spirit of Satan rejected them. Jesus, then, did not speak in parables; but rather the Jews, blinded by their passions, did not wish, and did not deserve, to understand the evidence of His miracles or the meaning of His words.

NAZARETH ALUMNAE BANQUET.

The annual banquet of the Nazareth Alumnae Association was held Tuesday at Nazareth Convent, and it proved a most enjoyable occasion. Bishop McQuaid and the clergy of the city were guests.

A reception was given by the young ladies to the priests of the city churches at 5 p. m., in the convent parlor; after which a pleasing program was presented in the assembly hall of the academy. The order of the program as follows: Piano solo, "The Chase," Minnie F. O'Laughlin; The Child and the School, Mary Prendergast; vocal solo, "Spring," Bertha V. Gausman; A House on the Emerald Isle, Julia C. Meagher; violin solo, "Cavalina No. 3, op. 85," Elizabeth Fee; Beauty in the House, Anna J. Casey; vocal solo, "Thou Wondrous Youth" Fr. Aht. Minnie B. M. Staud (with violin obligata); Our Alumnae, Katharine L. Caring, Annalist.

The papers read by the young ladies deserve special commendation. Miss Prendergast treated of the relation of the child to the school from a professional standpoint. Miss Meagher's account of her experiences in Ireland, during a recent visit to that country, was received with much interest and pleasure. The suggestions given in Miss Casey's paper on the harmonious and artistic decoration of the house showed a cultivated taste, and an artistic sense of the beautiful and fitting in household decorations. In the charming account of the beginnings and growth of "Our Alumnae," Miss Caring made graceful and touching allusions to the school days at Nazareth, and paid a warm tribute to the clergy and the teachers interested in, or connected with the school and the alumnae.

The evening's program ended with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the convent chapel, the Rt. Rev. Bishop officiating, assisted by Very Rev. T. F. Hickey and Rev. G. V. Burda.

The young ladies of the Alumnae Association deserve great praise for the taste displayed in every feature of the evening's entertainment, as well as for the intellectual and cultural attainments which they have so ably evinced.

The substance of the Bishop's speech was as follows:

"Young Ladies of the Association and Reverend Fathers:—We have time but for a few words. Our presence here indicates the interest we take in your organization. You are from all parts of the city and from all parts of the country. You come from far and near. We are always glad to have our Rochester boys and girls travel over the United States and build up homes for themselves; to find those homes retaining their old thorough-going Catholic spirit which they imbibed in their young days.

The reverend gentlemen here take pride in all institutions like this, when they see our young people true to their faith, loyal to their religion, loyal to all who are working to build up the Church of Christianity; that true civilization may reach out to many souls.

We know what comes forth from Nazareth Academy, we know what comes forth from the schools where our children, by tens of thousands, receive the early training which you received; where they imbibed the holy truths which you imbibed."

were excellent. The execution by Miss O'Laughlin and Miss Fee was marked with the usual skill and grace. The vocalists of the evening, Miss Staud and Gausman gave the audience great pleasure by their beautifully rendered vocal solos.

At the completion of the program the guests were escorted to the banquet hall where covers for seventy-two alumnae and thirty priests were laid by Teall. The hall was tastefully prepared and decorated for the occasion, while a hidden orchestra added not a little to the general pleasure.

After the repast the assembly was addressed by the president of the association, Miss Hogan, with expressions of welcome to the reverend guests who honored the occasion with their presence. Miss Hogan then introduced Miss Anna Messer, representative of the last class admitted into the association. Miss Messer voiced the gratitude of her class for the cordial welcome they had received from the senior members, as also for the pleasure and benefit accorded them as members of the association.

A brief address by Rt. Rev. Bishop McQuaid followed, in which the bishop expressed his gratification with the evening's entertainment, as well as his approval of the character and working of the association. He likewise warmly commended the work done by the Catholic schools of Rochester and by their Alumnae organizations for the promotion of faith, of social culture and of the interests of citizenship.

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After some kind and pleasant remarks on the essays read by some of the young ladies, the Bishop continued as follows:

"We thank God, young ladies, for the beautiful spirit you possess in common with all the educated Catholic ladies and gentlemen of Rochester, who maintain the strength of their holy faith, proud of the blessings that come to them through the services of these holy women who have been mothers to them. We are glad to note your gratitude to your pastors who make sacrifices for you and for all the others of their flock."

We give thanks to the Alumnae and we beg and pray that in the future as in the past you may hold up your heads as Catholic ladies, proud of their religion, always advancing higher; for the more you know, the better able you are to fill your place in the world, and the higher you will stand in the estimation of the educated world. So may God bless your work and your organization, and may He keep you true to this year Alma Mater, and to those good Sisters who have labored for you."

Flowers are Blooming Again. In California the air is pure and bracing and the sun shines most all the time. No January ice, February snows or bleak March winds, and you can reach it via the New York Central Lines and their direct connections in four days.

The Catholic Home Bureau to find homes in good locations where orphan children and the aged and infirm can be cared for. For further information apply to the Catholic Home Bureau, 22 St. Nicholas St., New York City.

WORKS BY ALFRED...
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Week of Passion...

At the...
church, last Sunday...
O'Neil, the...
services of Rev. William...
St. Mary's church, this...

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and of the young...
of the children of the...
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a guide and...
years of school life...
penance he has...
times professed...
of abolition, giving...
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discontent. From...
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