

spots where they were placed, just for the sake of the green creepers that twined about them, or the ferns that sprang in delicate clusters from the broken brickwork.

The world is a very big, wonderful place; but Lucia's world had nothing in it half so big or so important to her as her mother and the goats; and the striding arches of the old aqueducts which stretched across the plain were to her merely places to play hide-and-seek round.

The time came when Lucia was left to watch the goats alone, and the ruins which had made such a gay and pleasant playground grew sad in her eyes. Her mother died.

Lucia had only her goats left now, but to them she gave her heart, and in them, after a while, she found her happiness. She could talk to them of her mother. They had known her. And though they could not speak, Lucia felt quite sure, by the pretty caressing ways they had with them, that they understood all she said, and would have told her they were sad and sorry for her, if they could have spoken.

The farmer who had employed the mother, now left Lucia still in charge of her pets—for in truth the notion of being parted from them seemed as if it would break the child's heart—and the man being kind-hearted, did not wish anything so sad as that to happen, so he yielded to her piteous prayers, "not to send her away."

"I am afraid she is almost too young to manage the creatures," he said.

But it did not turn out so, and in truth, Lucia proved a very good and watchful little goat-herd.

Every morning, very early, and again in the afternoon, she might be seen—and may be still—by those who look the right way, gravely marching at the head of her little troop, bringing them into the city to be milked.

In some parts of Italy, as in the Eastern Bible lands, the shepherd still leads his flock—he does not drive them—and they follow him, knowing his voice, though they know not the voice of strangers. So Lucia walks in front, and the goats, with their little bells tinkling as they go, follow after, through all the narrow and the crowded streets, stopping at this house and that, to be milked. Not that the goats are by any means done with when the house-door that opens on the street is reached. For in Italy, as in many foreign countries, there are different houses under one roof—flats as we call them—one or even more on each floor, up to the fourth or even fifth storey.

So in Italian towns, as you walk along in the early morning or in the afternoon, it often happens that you see a group of meek-faced goats gathered about an open doorway. But you do not see the goat-herd.

Presently, if you wait a little while, you will hear a clattering from the tiny hoofs which are coming down the marble staircase of the house, and the goats waiting beneath will begin to stir themselves and bleat, as much as to say—"Here we are ready, aren't you coming?"

In a moment the goat-herd—our Lucia, perhaps—will come bounding down the stairs, and then all the little group will move on some few doors further.

When the next stopping-place is reached, Lucia will call the goats she wants by name, and running up the

stairs without looking round, she knows that those she has called, Mira or Cella, or whatever their names may be, will follow her up to the top of the house, if she leads the way—all the rest, whom she has not called, will remain patiently waiting in the street below.

No wonder Lucia loved her goats and believed that they understood every word that she said to them.

At the same time, she had a good deal of trouble with her large family. Of course, no one, not even a goat, can be expected always to behave exactly right, and sometimes Lucia was made very anxious by the wild and boisterous ways of her young ones, whose spirits quite got the better of them; at other times the old goats would get talking politics together as they went along, and would then begin quarrelling and butting at one another in a most alarming way. Of course, there were one or two scapegraces among them, who always led the rest into mischief, and one or two who were specially bad-tempered, and were always bleating out that some other goat wasn't treating them properly. All these little disputes Lucia had to settle, and very hard work she found it sometimes, especially when the goats got cross with one another, as they now and then did in the middle of a crowded street.

Then there were other troubles which did not arise from any fault on the goats' part. When the kids grew old enough they were often taken away from Lucia's flock to be sold or to be drafted into other flocks. This was always a very sore trial to Lucia, who could not bear to part from the little creatures who had grown up under her very eyes; but the saddest trouble of all was when Stella, the flower of the flock, Lucia's special favourite, pined away and died, when her two little kids, white like herself, were scarcely three days old.

Lucia cried as if her heart would break, over the dead body of her pet, whose little babies were still cuddling close to her and wondering why their mother did not answer their piteous calls to her. Lucia took them in her warm brown arms and tried her best to console them, while her tears dropped fast on their thick white coats.

"You poor little dears," she said, "don't cry. When my mother went away she told me the good God always took care of motherless things, and so He'll be sure to take care of you, and if you'll only be quiet, you shall be my dearest darling pets—both of you."

Whether the baby-kids understood the full comfort of these words or not, they both left off crying, and nestled down, each of them a rough white head in Lucia's arms, and Lucia felt that it was all settled between them. So she brought up the orphan-kids with her own hands, feeding them hour after hour with bread-and-milk and other dainties, and watching over them as tenderly as their mother could have done.

They grew into splendid goats, white and silky, and when the farmer, Lucia's master, saw them, and heard how fond Lucia had grown of them, and of all the care she had taken of them, he promised that he would never sell these two, and that they should be considered as Lucia's own.

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—When Christ comes we must be found not stripping off the ornaments from our person, but the censoriousness from our tongues, and selfishness from our hearts.

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