

At the first landing you will find some one who will take you to the lady."

Jesus thanked him sweetly and humbly, and mounted the beautiful stairway, taking care to avoid touching the balustrade and the frescoes. Arriving at the first landing He heard the question repeated:

"What do you wish?"

Then the slave bade the Child remove His sandals and leave them on the mat of palm fibre, that He might not soil the smyrna carpet and said:

"To-day our lady receives all who come, and it is now the hour for these audiences."

So saying, the slave opened the door.

"What do you wish, my pretty child?" asked a lady who reclined in a low and luxurious chair of gold and ivory.

"Mary, my Mother, has no bread, and she sent Me to you; we are hungry."

"But has Joseph no work?"

"No, lady. He has been ill this fortnight."

"I give only to the poor, my boy, and Joseph is a workman."

"My Mother says he has not been paid for his last work, and we have never been rich enough to put anything by!"

"But what would become of me if I were to give to all who ask? Joseph is a good carpenter, I know, for he has worked for me. He ought easily to earn enough to buy bread for a child and its mother. No, no! I have my poor and I can give you nothing. Go! Go!"

Jesus, always sweet and humble, did not forget to salute the beautiful lady before He turned to the door and descended the stairway. He also saluted the slave, and then pensively took the road that led from Simonias to Nazareth. He sang no more, for He was sad, and hunger was gnawing at Him. He was scarcely six years old and He had nothing to eat since midday.

All at once He stopped and listened. Someone was praying aloud in a little cottage, the only window and the door of which were open.