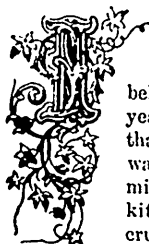


TOMASO.



INTO the warm waiting-room of the railroad station he crept fearfully, and tried to hide behind a big radiator. He was seven years old, but not an inch larger than a five-year old should be. He was very dirty, very ragged and very miserable. He carried a blacking kit over his shoulders and held five crumpled papers under his arm.

The deaconess on duty at the station spied the little fellow.

"What's your name, little boy?" she asked.

"Tomaso," he replied, with trembling lip.

She drew up a rocking chair, for they have rocking chairs in that station, and took him, rags and all, on her motherly lap.

"What's the matter, Tommy?" she asked pitifully.

"I—I can't sell my papers, an' I hain't got a single shine, and the boys out there beat me awfully!" and the sobs burst out unrestrained.

A glance out the window showed "the boys" still in an angry knot, telling each other how "that impudent kid thought he'd inter business 'round these 'ere corners. But we jest sent him howlin'."

The deaconess remembered a big box of lunch that a chance traveler had put into her hands. She produced it now and watched its contents disappearing. It was a prosaic kind of comfort, but very satisfactory to the half-starved little lad.

"Now, Tommy, tell me how you try to get shines and sell papers. Maybe you don't do it right. Suppose I am your customer. How would you ask me?"

"Have a shine?" said Tommy, but in a hopeless, monotonous tone.

"Oh, that's not the way. You must say, 'Please, sir, have a shine!' You must speak up bright, and smile and look right at him. Try it again."

The deaconess drilled him ten minutes. Then she took him into the toilet room, washed such parts of his little body as she could get at, and smoothed his hair. He was really a sweet-looking little fellow.

"Now," she said, "try that man. His boots need shining. Don't forget to smile."

"Please, sir, have a shine?" said Tommy exactly as his teacher had told him to, and the gentleman looked down at the eager face and replied, "I don't care if I do."

After that Tommy sold two papers—nine cents in all. Then he wanted to carry the money right away home to his mother. The deaconess put a little towel and a piece of soap into the box with the rest of the lunch, and they went together past the still glowering boys. It was a dreadful home. The father was dead, the mother was very sick.

When the deaconess returned she passed by the boys.

"What was the matter with Tommy?" she asked.

"Dat young dago? Ain't nothin' the matter wid him, but dar will be if he don't keep away from dese corners."

"But his father's dead and his mother's sick. He must sell papers or starve. Why, he hadn't had anything to eat this morning till I gave him something, and he's such a little fellow!"

The boys looked very much ashamed. "Sorry we licked him," one of them said, looking steadily down at the ground.

The next morning Tomaso came again to the station, and again a convenient lunch waited for him. But this time his hands and face were quite clean and his face actually had a smile on it.

"Come, Tommy," said the deaconess, "let's go out on the corner where you'll have a little chance to sell papers and get shines."

"But the boys!" and the lad's face grew actually pale.

"I'll stand by you awhile."

So they went out. Sure enough, the boys came straight toward them. Tommy shivered away nearly out of sight in the hospitable folds of the black gown of his new friend. But this time he need not have feared.

"Is yer pap dead?" asked one of the biggest of the group.

"Yes," with pathetic brevity.

"Is yer mam sick?"

"Yes."

"Well, Tom, we've gin yer this corner. It's a bully one. Yer can sell papers an' get shines on it all ye want to. Hear?"

Tommy's business prospered exceedingly after that, and the little chap himself prospered yet more under the fostering care of his deaconess friend. His mother got well, his hands and face were always clean, he lost his haggard, unchild-like look, and his face actually took on a sign of baby plumpness. The deaconess told him of God and heaven and enticed him into the Sunday-school.

But one day he was not at his corner. A week