

'He is ill. First he was a bricklayer, and fell off a house and broke his leg. Then he got an organ and played in the streets till he was too weak to stir from the house.'

'And this is the fate of the religious,' said Antonio, turning to his friend. 'Mother dead, father lame and sick, child wasting with cold and hunger. I am an unbeliever and rich. Will you not rather change with me, little Lotta?'

The child looked up as if uncertain whether the question was put earnestly or in jest.

Antonio repeated. 'Choose honestly, little girl,—my lot or yours.'

'I shall be rich some day,' she said, 'and live with a King and wear a crown; but your riches will be of no use to you when you die. Father says we needn't envy rich people. And mother is quite glad and happy now, though she was poor.'

Carlotta had evidently counted the cost. Antonio had not expected to find so steady a mind in the little pale-faced girl.

He laughed. 'This is a real little Christian,' he said. Then addressing the room—'Friends, we cannot buy her over to think with us; and perhaps it is well so; but we can give her of our superfluity. Shall we make a collection for our little singer?'

The Italians love music and are tender-hearted to children, so very soon the child's plate was full of silver and copper coins.

Tears of joy filled Carlotta's dark eyes. She turned to Antonio, her first friend. 'Thank you, thank you, sir,' she cried gratefully. 'I am glad my Shepherd brought me here to-day.'

And then she hurried out into the wet, anxious to take the good news to her father.

'A happy little fanatic truly,' commented Antonio.

A week or two later, as Antonio and Francis were again strolling out together, the former said abruptly: 'Here is the street where Carlotta said she lived; shall we see how it fares with her and her sick father?'

He had said little to anyone concerning his thoughts of late, but they had run very much on the strange content of the little beggar maid.

Poor, starved, despised, she was yet happy. And why? 'Because she has religion,' Antonio could not help answering to himself. 'She has that strange, wonderful thing called faith. It must be a good thing to have, for Francis is glad to own it, and I, —well, I am restless, to say the least.'

Here a broken staircase jutted out on to the street. It was the way-mark by which Carlotta said her dwelling might be found.

The friends carefully mounted the rough steps, finding at the very top of the house a garret-room open to the rafters. The small barrel-organ at the entrance assured them that they had come to the right spot, even if they had not seen the sick man lying on a sack of straw in the corner, with Lotta by his side.

She sprang up with a cry of joy at sight of the visitors. 'Father, here they are! You wanted to see the gentlemen who were so good to me.'

Such a gaunt form raised itself from the wretched couch, such hollow eyes were turned towards the well-dressed, well-fed men!

Poor, sick, starved brother! Antonio's pitiful heart went out towards him.

'God bless you, sir!' cried the poor man. 'God give you my peace and rest, when you come to die, for your goodness to my little daughter.'

Peace and rest on that miserable wind-blown bed of straw!

'You are wonderfully contented amidst your pain and poverty, my friend,' declared Antonio. 'I fear I should not have your cheerful spirit in a like case. But, at least, as a return for any pleasure I may have afforded to our little friend here, give me your recipe for patience in suffering.'

'Sir,' said the sick man gravely, 'I have no recipe. I believe in God, in His promises. He cares for me; why should I be uneasy, whatever happens?'

'Who taught you this?' asked Antonio, much interested. 'It is a wonderful creed.'

'It is the creed I learned as a child,—the creed of our holy faith.'

'Have you ever proved it—proved it true,