

“Are you never afraid that God may punish you, Bastiano?” sighed my mother.

“For what? why should He? words do no harm: and there is no fear of the peasants revenging themselves; I defy them, they never could know me again. I have my plaister over my eye, and I twist my mouth—you know how. My dear soul, if I did not frighten them, they would never give me a farthing.”

“That is true,” acquiesced my mother.

“They are afraid of my casting a spell

upon them. If you could know what a mind I have to burst out laughing when they call me *Stregoni!*”

My mother was silent—silent and pensive. Before she put me to bed she always made me say my prayers, and lit a good fire: “Warm thyself, *Giaconino mio*; thou hast been so cold all the day long.” It was but a short prayer that she taught me, and I still say it on waking and before falling asleep:—“My God, make me virtuous, gentle, patient; give me health; give us our daily bread from the



hand of such as take pity on us: whoever they be, rich or poor, good or bad, bless them, I beseech Thee. I ask it in the name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Divine Son. Blessed Virgin Mary, all Saints, all Angels, pray for us. Amen.”

Once in bed I soon fell asleep, my eyes fixed to the last upon my mother, who sat there mending our clothes, while father sorted seeds for the gardeners.

I never knew how it came about that my

mother was brought to beg; my father, however, used to say to her—

“My poor Lucia, thou art so feeble; if there was hard work to do, thou never couldst stand it. It is best to go on as we do.”

We had no relations at Pisa, but a few neighbours came to see us. My mother had a friend, a beggar like herself, named Teresa. The priests knew her well, and often bestowed an alms upon her.

“What will you make of the little lad?”