

our finger-points the softness of their white hands when they gave us alms.

I saw but little of my father, whom I feared far more than I loved. He was in the habit of getting up very early in the morning, and taking a round in the country—this he did unknown to his partners, and whatever he gained he kept to himself.

The very poor are like the very rich—either dreadfully miserly or extravagant and thoughtless. I have often seen some of them spend in one hour at the public-house what it had taken them a week to gain; and I have seen others who would rather let bread get mouldy than give a crust to a poor hungry cripple at their door. Great destitution and great wealth have alike a tendency to render men selfish; they contract the heart. The more hideous and filthy my father made himself, the more money he got and the more unfeeling he became. Me he would scold or beat for the merest trifle. Pietrina, the poor shy creature who used to sit at the door of the cathedral, hiding her face over her baby or leaning it back against a pillar, closing her eyes the while—that silent, pretty girl took to befriending me and remonstrating with my father about me, which made him better. Pietrina seemed to have a good deal of influence over him, much as Pallidina had over me. He would attend to all she said.

“Do you know, Bastiano, that it is a sin against God to deceive kind-hearted souls by pretending to have infirmities, and God will very likely punish you for it? For my part, you may observe, I say nothing, because I will not deceive good people. Formerly I used to talk of my sick mother, but it was a sin, because it was not true, and now I never utter a word. I will not lie, I am determined. I speak to God only, and He gives me my daily bread.”

“Why don’t you work, then, Pietrina?” was the question sometimes put to her.

“Because, like little Momo, I was brought up in the streets doing nothing. I cannot sew neatly or turn to any work. My health has got weakened by sitting still all day. I have tried more than once to get work in a farm, but the work was too much for me, and I had to leave and go into the hospital. I have often asked ladies to take me, but they won’t have beggars about their children. And then, you see, there is always some reason in a person’s life for doing what they do.”

“Where is your husband, Pietrina?” asked I one day.

“I cannot tell you, my poor little man,” was her mournful reply; “and if I did, it would do thee no good to know.”

Her little child, whose name was Ettore, was by this time beginning to walk, and so pretty that it was thought he might fill my post when I outgrew it. I was very fond of the little fellow. Pallidina and I often played with him, and sometimes I used to beg with him in my arms.

Of all strangers, the least affected by our distress were English *lords*. I shall never forget my father’s rage one day that he had applied to an old lord with a long white beard and military air. “Take pity, milord, upon a poor blind man, and the Lord will give you Paradise!”

“Paradise is not to be bought, my good man; and as to that, I don’t see very well myself, but I have spectacles, and don’t ask you for anything.”

Much incensed, my father consigned *Il Lordo* to the bottomless pit, and wished him every conceivable misfortune.

The gentleman, who understood Italian, stood still to listen, then replied, “The same to you.” I do believe my father would have thrown stones at him but for Pietrina, who gravely said—

“You do not beg like a Christian, Bastiano! God will not protect you, and you do us harm rather than good. I know that the poor of Pisa have a very bad name; I have often seen strangers point at us and say, ‘Those are the most worthless beggars in Europe!’ It makes me feel ashamed to see you all rush like a band of hungry dogs upon their prey.”

“It’s our way,” returned Mother Teresa: “if we had your pretty face, we might take it more quietly; but we are old and ugly, and at our age our only chance is to harass people.”

“Nay, look at that poor little old woman, Mother Orgina, always beside the holy water. She has done nothing all her life long but pray to God and bless the passers-by, and everybody gives to her.”

“That’s an exception,” observed my father. “I know how things stand, and here, where everybody is full of superstition, there is more to be got by being, as I am, a *Stregon*, than by merely exciting compassion.”

Pallidina would often say to me, “I would much rather work than do nothing.”

“But why should one tire oneself when one can get one’s living so well without? And then, if you were to work, you would not be with us, and you would never see me again.”

“That is just what prevents me, Momo,” she would reply.

Such conversations, however, saddened and made me thoughtful. After all, begging was