

ADRIFT IN NAPLES

BY

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"PEEPS INTO THE ITALIAN HOMES OF LONDON"
ETC.

SECOND EDITION

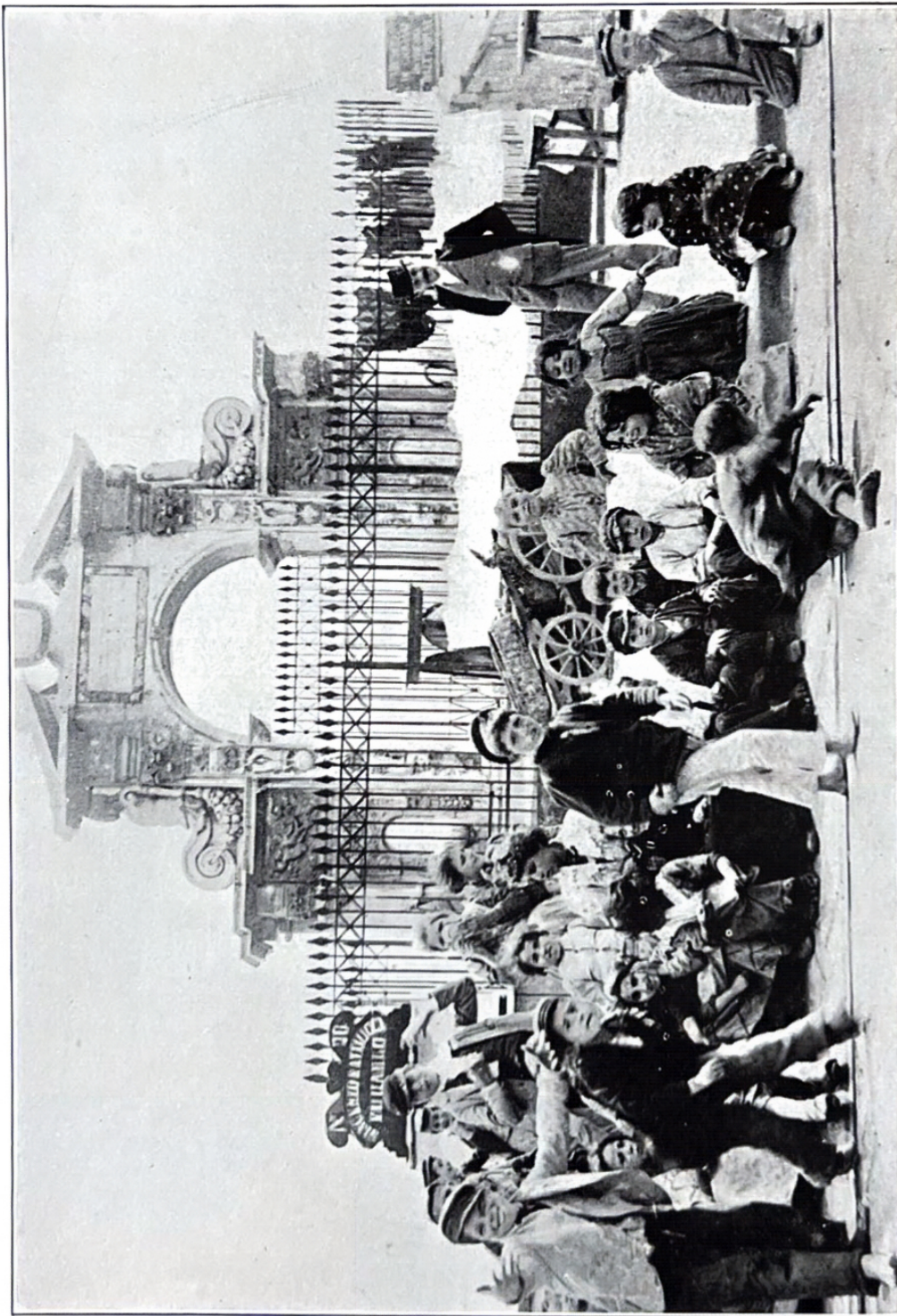
LONDON

C. A. HAMMOND

3 & 4 LONDON HOUSE YARD, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1926

Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth William Brendon & Son, Ltd.



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A GROUP OF NEAPOLITAN CHILDREN

A. F. G. Seaton, Ludgate Circus House

CHAPTER I

YES, it was a hard bed the little boy had chosen ; yet he looked quite comfortable, and if one might judge by the smile on his sunburnt face, he was enjoying very pleasant dreams. He was lying on one of the old, broken-down steps of the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, in Naples ; one little brown arm served as a pillow for his curly head, and all he possessed in the way of garments or bedclothes was a ragged old pair of trousers. Two or three other boys were lying near, and all looked as though they had never been used to a better bed.

But I must tell you our little friend's name. He was called Peppuccio, which is Neapolitan for " Little Joe." You must pronounce it like this : " Peppooch," for none of his acquaintances ever called him anything else, though that is not the proper way to say it. As for his surname, Peppuccio himself could not have told you what it was, for he had never heard. He did not remember his father at all, but he had some faint recollections of a mother who had died four or five years ago.

Peppuccio was scarcely nine years old, but he

was already earning his own living, and, though he was often hungry, he always managed to pick up enough to keep him from starving. But now our little friend is beginning to stir, for morning is dawning, and Peppuccio is not a long sleeper. Perhaps you will think he has not much temptation in that direction with such a hard bed as his ; well, be that as it may, he is opening his eyes and looking around him. Bright, dark brown eyes they are, with a roguish twinkle in them, and shaded by long, soft lashes. He has a pretty face, but oh, how thin it is ! The brown cheeks, instead of being plump and round as a little boy's cheeks ought to be, are *so* hollow, and his arms and legs look hardly anything but skin and bone. However, up he jumps, as briskly as if there were nothing before him but pleasure, whereas the poor little man does not in the least know where he is to get any breakfast ; he has not even a " soldo " (a halfpenny) in his pocket, and he has no kind father and mother to provide it for him.

What a good thing it is to be contented !

For a few moments Peppuccio stood on the steps and looked about him. The Piazza Mercato, or Market Square, is not beautiful, though it is one of the most famous places in Naples. Perhaps, when you are older, you will read in your history-books about the poor young Prince Corradino, who was beheaded in this very square, and his body thrown into a ditch close by, and how his heart-broken mother travelled a long, long dis-

tance, and by means of entreaties and tears and money, at last obtained leave to give it a more honourable burial.

You will read, too, how the fisherman, Masaniello, in the year 1647, stirred up a revolution against the cruel Spanish Duke then governing Naples. It was from this same square that Masaniello for nine days ruled the city. It was in that very church, on the steps of which Peppuccio has been sleeping, that the fisherman was appointed ruler ; it was in the monastery close by that he was murdered, and in that church that he was buried.

Altogether, the Piazza Mercato is a sad sort of place. Its history is sad, and its present appearance is sad. It is surrounded by tall, dingy-looking houses, and has a prison on one side and a hospital on the other, while in the centre stands a large, ugly market-hall. The one pretty thing in the place is the Campanile, or bell-tower del Carmine, which is very high, and can be seen from a great distance.

At present the square is almost empty, for it is very early yet. Here and there you may see a man skulking along in the shadow of the tall houses, as if he wished to keep out of sight ; and so he does, for he is a thief, going home with the money of which he has robbed some lonely passer-by. He has a knife under his cloak, which he does not mind using if his victim is not ready to give up his money or his watch at once.

Peppuccio watches the man go by ; he knows what he is, but he does not feel frightened, for *he* has no watch and no money to lose, and I am afraid he neither knows nor cares much about the sinfulness of the life the thief is leading.

But now Peppuccio had finished his survey of the square ; he knew that at this early hour he could not expect to earn a breakfast ; he must wait till there were more people about ; so he thought he would go and get a breath of sea-air first. There were fountains in the piazza, and Peppuccio might have had a wash before starting for his walk, but that was an operation he very seldom thought of performing. He did not take the nearest way to the sea, for that part of the shore which belonged to the Mercato Quarter was rather desolate and deary ; he preferred the livelier Santa Lucia, where fishermen mended their nets, and brown babies rolled in the sand.

So off he trudged through lanes such as I am sure you have never seen, and which it would frighten you even to look at, let alone to pass through. One lane was bordered by houses so high that only a tiny strip of sky was to be seen far above ; and it was so narrow that people might have shaken hands across it through the windows ; the bright, cheerful sunlight never entered that dark, miserable street. Another, which wound in and out in the form of a serpent, was also so narrow that a carriage could not have

passed through it, and in the middle there was a sort of gutter, filled with black, dirty water, which had no drains to run into, and which had stood there till it smelt most horribly. Another lane was really a kind of filthy canal, but Peppuccio paddled merrily through all the mud and water. What did he care that his black little feet were growing blacker still? Ah, poor Peppuccio! you will soon learn what mischief comes from dirt and want of fresh air and sunlight! In those very lanes through which he was passing people were sickening and dying of that dreadful disease, cholera. In the parts of Naples where the sunlight and fresh air could come not many died, but in those close, dirty, neglected neighbourhoods they were dying by thousands. Peppuccio had heard about it; he had seen people taken ill in the street; he had seen some taken to the hospital; ah! and he had seen some taken to the cemetery up on the hill; but he had not thought much about it. He would stand and watch with solemn, awe-struck face while the sick and the dead were carried past him, and he would feel very sad for about two minutes; and then he would begin to turn somersaults, and whistle or sing again as light-heartedly as ever.

So this morning he sped on, singing one of his favourite Neapolitan songs, till at last he came out into the Strada Santa Lucia, a street which was wide and sunny, though none too clean. By this time Naples was waking up, and when he reached

the beach close by he found that he was not by any means the only boy who had come to enjoy a gambol by the side of the softly plashing sea. The sound of angry, screaming voices did not at all surprise him, or spoil his enjoyment, for he knew that the women of the Quarter Santa Lucia are famous for their noisy quarrels—quarrels which often end in blows, or even stabs. Sometimes the poor, half-savage creatures grow so mad with rage that they hurl down chairs and other articles of furniture on the heads of the people in the street below.

Peppuccio watched the fishermen at their work, played with some of the brown babies, paddled in the sea (which process happily removed some of the mud contracted on his journey), and did not leave the beach till he felt that it was really high time to see about breakfast. So off he ran to the Toledo, the chief street of Naples, to see who might be in want of his services. Up and down he wandered, but could find nothing to do. He was really very hungry by this time, and the little sunburnt face was beginning to look sadly pinched as the effect of his night's rest wore off.

The various eating-shops were being opened; from that of a "friggitore," or frying-man, issued a smell of fish and bad oil, which was very tempting to our poor Peppuccio, who for one soldo might have bought a breakfast there; at another shop he might have purchased for the same sum a slice of "pizza," a sort of dough mixed with half raw

tomatoes, garlic, pepper, and marjoram. But where was the soldo to be found ?

He was quite in despair about his breakfast, and was furtively rubbing the back of his hand across the dark eyes, into which a couple of tears had found their way, when he happened to knock up against a stout, good-natured looking woman, who was munching a piece of bread as she walked along. Involuntarily he stood and watched her with eager, hungry eyes—watched a bit of bread find its way into her mouth, and wished it had gone into his own. Poor little fellow ! He had never been taught manners, so who could blame him ? The good woman evidently did not, for directly she noticed that longing, lingering gaze, she broke off the larger half of the bread, and put it into his hand. She was poor and hungry herself, but what of that ? A Neapolitan woman, ignorant and uncivilised though she may be, is generally ready to give part of her own food to any child who looks as if he wanted it. If it were not for the kindness of the poor to each other, the misery in Naples would be still greater than it is.

As happy as a king, and a great deal happier, Peppuccio began to dig his pretty white teeth into the bread, but he had only eaten one mouthful when he was accosted by a boy two or three years older than himself, and with whom he was slightly acquainted.

“ I say, Peppuccio,” was his greeting, “ wouldn’t you like some ‘ scapece ’ on your bread ? ”

“ Yes,” answered our little friend, “ but I haven’t a soldo to buy any.”

“ Well, if you’ll promise to come with me afterwards, and do what I tell you, I’ll buy you some.”

Peppuccio promised readily enough, and together they went into a shop, the owner of which, in return for the soldo given him by the elder boy, poured upon the bread some curious stuff made of very small pumpkins, called “ zucchini,” fried in oil, and seasoned with pepper, marjoram, cheese, and tomatoes. This was supposed to give a delicious flavour to the bread, and you may imagine the delight with which our little hungry boy consumed his breakfast. Not until the last crumb was gone did he think of the promise he had just given.

“ What is it you want me to do, Pietro ? ” he asked.

“ I’ll tell you by and by,” was Pietro’s answer ; “ let us go down to the ‘ Molo ’ for a little while ; we can talk more quietly there, without any one hearing us.”

And in truth the Toledo was getting very full and noisy by this time, not at all the place for a quiet conversation. So off they went, taking the same direction from which Peppuccio had come. They crossed the Strada Santa Lucia again, but instead of going down to the little strip of beach, they sauntered along the Molo, or quay. The

Molo was lively enough too, but still there was a quiet corner to be found here and there.

A number of lazzaroni were gathered together listening to a "canta-storia," or story-teller, a shabbily dressed man with a bare head and red face, who in a very loud voice was reciting verses taken from a famous poem written by the Italian poet Tasso. This man did not repeat the poetry at all as Tasso wrote it ; he altered the words, and mispronounced them, and every now and then stopped to explain it to his hearers ; only I am afraid his explanations did not make the sense any clearer, but rather the contrary. But the ragged men and boys who stood and sat around him were perfectly satisfied ; they got quite excited over his performance, and added their cries of astonishment and interest to his explanations, so that between them all there was not much of the real Tasso left.

But Peppuccio and Pietro had not come to listen to the canta-storia to-day, so they crept into a nook a little way off from the crowd, sat down on the ground, gathered up their knees with their arms, and began their conversation.

" You don't often get enough to eat, do you, guaglió ? " * was Pietro's first question, spoken in a low, solemn tone.

" No," answered our little friend, shaking his curly head ; he was not at all doubtful about the answer to *that* question.

* " Guaglione ", a Neapolitan word for " boy."

“ And you don't get very good clothes to wear ? ”

Peppuccio hesitated. That was a thought that had never struck him ; but, as he surveyed his one ragged garment, he began to suspect that Pietro had spoken the truth.

“ No, I suppose not,” he answered slowly.

“ Where do you sleep at night ? ”

“ On the steps of a church, or under a boat.”

“ I thought so. Now, how would you like always to have plenty to eat, good clothes to wear, and a bed to sleep in ? ”

Peppuccio's brown eyes opened to their widest extent. The bare idea of such grandeur almost took away his breath.

“ What do you mean, Pietro ? ” he managed to say at last.

“ I mean that you can have all that, if you will do as I tell you.”

“ But what am I to do ? ”

“ Listen ! ” and Pietro looked round to see whether any one was within earshot, then went on in a lower tone.

“ You shall come with me for a walk in the Toledo, and perhaps by and by we shall see a gentleman with his handkerchief hanging a little way out of his pocket. Then, directly I tell you, you must go and walk near him, and while he is looking the other way, just snatch the handkerchief. It is very easy. I know a place where we

can sell it, and then you will have the money to buy food."

"But, Pietro, wouldn't that be stealing?" asked Peppuccio, quite aghast. He had done a good many naughty things in his life, but he had never stolen; he had managed to earn his living, such as it was, honestly.

"What of that, you simpleton?" cried the older boy, laughing. "The 'signori'* have a great deal more than they need, while we poor folks starve. If they won't give us what we want, we must take it from them, that's all."

"But I couldn't be a thief," stammered Peppuccio; yet Pietro saw something in his face which made him feel sure that only a little more was needed to make him give way.

And so it proved. A little coaxing, a little mocking, and he had promised to do all Pietro wished. Poor little Peppuccio! No kind mother, no Sunday-school teacher to tell him what was right, no Bible to show him *God's* thoughts about sin! What wonder that he fell into the snare? I wonder whether you and I would not have done the same. But I don't mean to say that he was not to blame. God had put within him a conscience which told him that stealing was wrong, though he did not see it as clearly as you who have been taught it from God's holy Word.

So the two boys went back to the Toledo, and

* Gentlefolks.

walked slowly along through the noisy crowd, carefully watching all the well-dressed people to see whether a handkerchief or a purse might be snatched from their pockets.

At last Pietro pointed out an old gentleman, the corner of whose handkerchief was sticking out.

“Not yet ! wait till he is looking at something,” he whispered. And soon the moment came. The old gentleman’s attention was attracted by a picture in a shop window, and Peppuccio, as he passed him, contrived to take possession of the coveted handkerchief. Quick as thought, the elder boy whisked it out of his hand into his own pocket, for Peppuccio had none in which to hide it, and the two boys were lost to view long before their victim knew what had happened.

Yes, Peppuccio was a thief ! He had taken the first step in a downward course, and who could tell where it would end ?

That was not the only handkerchief he stole that day, and Pietro, who had had longer experience in his sinful trade, robbed a lady of her purse. Peppuccio was treated by his tempter to a good dinner, and when evening came the latter sold the handkerchiefs to a shopkeeper in a back street. The bargain was made in a low tone, and Peppuccio was not allowed to see how much Pietro received for them ; but when they left the shop the elder boy put into his hand the sum of two “ lire,” or one shilling and eightpence, as well as a few odd soldi. The little brown hand had

never held so much money before. Peppuccio could hardly believe his own eyes.

“ Is it all mine ? ” he asked, eagerly.

“ Yes, all of it. You need not sleep on the steps to-night, Peppuccio. Will you come with me to my lodgings ? ”

Peppuccio willingly consented. What a wonderful thing it would be to sleep in a bed ! On the way they regaled themselves on some macaroni, which was ladled out of an enormous cauldron by the keeper of the maccaroni-shop. The boys each took his plate, and, sitting down on a bench by the door, laid hold of one end of a long string of macaroni, and opening their mouths, and throwing back their heads, dropped it down their throats. You will think this a very funny way of eating macaroni, but it is the Neapolitan fashion.

Their supper finished, they wound their way through one gloomy, dirty street after another, till they reached a very uninviting-looking house, at the door of which Pietro came to a standstill. They entered, and Peppuccio found, to his surprise, about a dozen other boys there, most of them older, but two or three as young as himself. There was a man there who said “ Buona sera ” (good evening) to them as they entered, and Pietro told him that this was the landlord.

“ You must pay him two soldi for your bed,” he added, while he produced the same sum from his own pocket. When he had received the money

the landlord showed them a narrow, dirty bed, which they were to share with another boy. Fresh lodgers kept on arriving, and they were all boys, not a grown-up person among them. Yes, and these boys were *all thieves*. Peppuccio did not know this, but he thought the landlord and the boys all looked very wicked, and it was with rather uncomfortable feelings that he laid himself down in the bed with his two companions.

He held his money tightly clasped in his hand, and at last whispered to Pietro a request that he would keep it in his pocket for him till morning. Pietro willingly consented, and the little boy felt greatly relieved, for he was by no means sure that it would be safe in such company.

Peppuccio felt very sleepy, and the bed was certainly softer than the stone steps, so he would most likely soon have been fast asleep, if his fellow-lodgers would have let him. But he found that this was not to be. On all sides he heard language such as he had never heard before, and which he could not very well understand ; but he was a sharp little fellow, and was soon able to make out most of what they were saying. These boys, of from seven to fourteen years old, were swearing the most dreadful oaths, and saying such wicked things that poor Peppuccio began to tremble all over.

“ Pietro, give me my money,” he whispered ;
“ I will go away ; I can't stay here ; they are so wicked.”

“ Nonsense ! don't be a baby,” answered his companion ; “ you will soon get used to it.”

So Peppuccio tried to lie still a few minutes longer ; but the oaths grew more and more terrible, and again he laid a trembling little hand on Pietro's shoulder.

“ *Please*, Pietro, *please* give me my money,” he pleaded ; “ I *must* go.”

“ Boys ! ” cried his so-called friend, “ here is a ‘ picirillo ’ (little one) who can't stay with us because we're so wicked. What do you think of that ? ”

A roar of mocking laughter arose from the other young thieves. I will not tell you the horrible things they said, but some of them came forward, and began to knock the poor little fellow about, and call him names. He did not know that they nearly all carried knives hidden in their clothes, or he might have been still more frightened than he was. Oh, how he wished himself once more on the hard stone steps, or under a boat on the beach.

At last a quarrel arose between two of his assailants, which attracted the attention of the others, and, seizing the opportunity, Peppuccio sprang with one bound from the bed, to which he had been pinned down by the two boys now fighting with each other, and in another moment was out in the street. But he did not linger for an instant near that dreadful spot. He sped on through street after street till at last, panting for

breath, he was obliged to stop. He looked behind ; he was not pursued, and with a sigh of relief, he sank down on a doorstep to rest. His two lire were gone, but Peppuccio did not trouble about that ; he was only too thankful to have escaped with his life from that terrible den of wickedness. Never—never would he forget that night.

“ Oh, what a wicked place the world is ! ” he thought to himself. There was another thought that came into his mind as well ; but he soon drove that thought away, for it was a very disagreeable one. It was this : “ What a wicked boy I am ! If I had not turned thief, I should never have been there.”

And so he sat meditating on the doorstep, the night air fanning his fevered brow, and forming a delightful contrast to the close, stifling atmosphere of the house he had just left, though the smell of the sulphur with which the streets were fumigated produced rather a choky feeling in his throat.

But Peppuccio was soon aroused from his reverie by the rumble of approaching wheels. He looked up, and as he looked he shuddered. A large, heavy carriage, surmounted by a cross, was just passing ; then came another, and then another. Peppuccio knew well enough what they were : they were the dead-carts, carrying to the cemetery the bodies of people who had died of cholera. He had just escaped from a scene of *sin*, and now he was face to face with *death* !

He had never read the words : “ By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” But he felt, as he had never felt before, that the world he was living in was a world of sin and death ; and as the last of the dead-carts rolled out of sight, the poor little fellow buried his face in his hands, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

CHAPTER II

GRADUALLY Peppuccio's sobs grew fainter and fewer ; his head sank upon his breast, and he fell asleep.

He seemed to have been sleeping only a few minutes, but it was really two or three hours, when he awoke with a terrified start. How strange he felt ! How cold his hands and feet were ! His face too—he was cold all over outside, though inside he felt quite hot, almost burning. He tried to rise to his feet, but fell back upon the step, too weak to stand. And now strange, sharp pains seized him ; he moaned aloud, and the large, dark eyes looked anxiously up and down the street to see whether any one would come to his help ; but no one was in sight. Morning was only just dawning, and all was silent and deserted.

Then it seemed to Peppuccio as though a film were coming over his eyes, and a cloud over his mind, and in another moment he was unconscious.

* * *

When Peppuccio next opened his eyes, the first fact of which he became aware was that he was lying in a bed, and that somebody was bending over him.

In a bed? Could it be that he was back in that terrible lodging-house, and that was one of his boy tormentors at his side?

But no; he looked up into the kind face of a gentleman, and he found that this gentleman was gently rubbing his poor little half-frozen limbs; then he looked around, and saw that he was lying in a large, clean room, lined with rows of beds like the one he was in. The kind face bending over him brightened at the sight of Peppuccio's return to consciousness, and its owner gently asked:

“Do you feel better, my child?”

“Gnorsì—yes, sir,” answered the little boy; but the next moment another of those dreadful pains made him moan and clutch the bed-clothes with both hands.

“Poor little fellow! Never mind; you'll soon be better, I hope. Are you thirsty?”

“Yes, I am burning—burning!”

His kind friend dropped a small lump of ice into Peppuccio's mouth. “There—that will do you good,” he said. Just then a woman, whom Peppuccio knew by her dress to be a sister of mercy, came up to the bedside. The gentleman turned towards her.

“Ah! you are ready now, Sister Teresa,” he said. “He is coming round a little. Go on with the rubbing, and give him some more ice if he wants it;” and then he passed on to the next bed, on which lay a middle-aged man, who was groaning as if in great pain.

“Where am I?” asked Peppuccio, as Sister Teresa went on with the rubbing. He hardly knew his own voice as he spoke—it seemed so hoarse and weak.

“You are in the hospital,” she answered, gently.

“In the hospital!” and Peppuccio gave a frightened start, for he had always heard of hospitals as very terrible places, where people were starved and ill-treated, and out of which they seldom came alive. But he did not like to say anything about this to Sister Teresa.

“How did I get here?” he asked, when he had a little recovered from the shock of finding that this was a hospital.

“You were taken ill in the street, and they brought you here to be taken care of.”

Peppuccio had yet another question to ask, but he shrank from putting it, for he felt almost certain what the answer would be, and, oh! how he dreaded to hear it!

“Is it the cholera?” he whispered, at last.

“Yes,” replied his nurse.

“Oh! sister, what *shall* I do? I shall die—I shall die!” and the poor little fellow burst into a fit of bitter crying.

“Zitto—hush! You will make yourself worse. If you keep quiet, I hope you will soon get better. May the Madonna grant it!” and Sister Teresa crossed herself as she spoke.

Poor Sister Teresa! She had more confidence in the Virgin Mary than in her Son, the blessed

Lord Jesus. He alone is the Good Physician, who is able to heal both soul and body.

As soon as she had quieted Peppuccio a little, Sister Teresa was obliged to leave him, for there were many—oh, so many!—patients in the hospital; the doctors and nurses could hardly manage to attend to them all, and if they spent too much time over *one*, the others must be neglected. So our little friend was left once more alone with his own thoughts.

His mind was quite clear now. He saw and understood all that went on, though the pain he was suffering was so terrible he scarcely knew how to bear it. But the thoughts—how they chased one another through his excited brain! And at last came *one* thought that drove away all the others, and took possession of him entirely.

It was this—“*I am a thief.*”

Yes, the very last day of health and strength had been stained with that dark sin. “A thief!” And so terrible became the agony caused by that thought that at last he ceased to feel his pain of body, the pain of mind was so much greater. And now other sins began to rise up before the eyes of his soul—sins which had never troubled him before, and he lay there and trembled as he looked back at his past life.

A very short life it was, only nine years. But even children of nine years old are sinners, and God has often opened their eyes to see it, and their hearts to feel what a dreadful thing sin is.

Have *your* eyes and *your* heart ever been opened to see this ?

And then Peppuccio said to himself, " Perhaps I shall die, and then what will become of me ? Such a naughty boy could not possibly go to heaven. Oh, what *shall* I do ? "

There was no one near to whisper in his ear what the Apostle Paul said to the jailor who asked the same question : " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Sister Teresa came up presently, and seeing the big tears rolling down his cheeks, she bent over him, and asked whether the pain was very bad.

" I don't know, Sister," he sobbed ; " it isn't that."

" What is it, then ? "

The little fellow looked up into her face to see whether he might confide in her. She seemed kind, but still there was something rather strange and hard in her face which did not exactly win his trust ; he could not feel thoroughly at home with her. So he was silent, and the sister passed on to attend to another patient who was calling her.

As soon as Peppuccio was left alone again the thoughts came crowding in thicker and faster. Very confused thoughts they were, but at last they all resolved themselves into this : " I'm a wicked boy, and I'm going to die."

Over and over again he repeated those words to himself ; over and over again his wistful eyes travelled round the crowded ward, as if in search

of some one who could help him. But the doctors and nurses were too busy, and the other patients too much occupied with their own pain and weakness to give a thought to the poor lonely little boy. At last such a feeling of utter misery and desertion overwhelmed him that he hid his face in the pillow, and groaned aloud.

“What is the matter, little one?” asked a hoarse, feeble voice close by.

Peppuccio raised his head, and found that the voice came from the man in the next bed, whose pain had somewhat abated by this time, and who, being a kind-hearted man, felt sorry for the poor little patient so close to him.

“What is the matter, little one? Is the pain so bad?”

“I’m going to die, I know,” was the sobbed-out answer; “and I’m such a bad boy. If only I knew I was fit to go to heaven, I wouldn’t mind.”

“Ask the Madonna to save you,” suggested his neighbour, whose name was Antonio.

“I’ve often asked her for things, and she has never given them to me,” Peppuccio answered despairingly. “I’m afraid she won’t listen to me at all.”

Antonio appeared rather shocked, but the doubtful look on his face gave the idea that he, too, had never received much help from the Virgin Mary.

“Pray to Jesus,” he said, after a little hesitation; “perhaps He would help you, figlio mio.”

Antonio had never felt the anxiety about his

soul which his little neighbour was passing through ; he could not speak from experience of the saving power of Jesus ; all the hope he could offer was a “ perhaps ” ; but even those few words seemed to bring a ray of comfort to the sorrowful child.

“ Jesus ! ” he thought ; “ that is Mary’s Son, who died upon the cross ; would He save me, I wonder ? I once heard somebody say He shed His blood on the cross for us sinners. That *was* kind of Him.” And he lay with closed eyes for a few minutes thinking over the wonderful fact which Antonio’s words had brought back to his mind, but of which he knew so very, very little. Gradually he began to gather some hope from the thought of the kindness of the Lord Jesus in dying on the cross, and he was just going to clasp his hands together and pray to Him, when a new idea flashed across his poor, bewildered mind.

“ But I have heard that Jesus is God, and that He is a great King ; so I surely can’t expect Him to listen to a poor little ragged boy like me. King Umberto would never take any notice of such as me, or speak to me, and God is greater than King Umberto ; so it isn’t likely *He* would listen to me.”

And so poor Peppuccio made up his mind that it was no use to think of asking the Lord Jesus to save him. No, there was no help for it, he thought ; he must be lost, for there was no one to save him.

Just then it struck him that there was an unusual noise in the street outside—shouts and rushings to and fro. He thought, too, that he could distinguish the words, “Viva il Re—Long live the King!”

Peppuccio was greatly puzzled, especially as there seemed to be also a good deal of excitement in the ward; doctors, nurses, and patients seemed to be talking about something very interesting, and most of them looked as pleased as anyone could be expected to look in such a scene of suffering. One of the nurses passed the foot of his bed two or three minutes later, and he asked her what it was all about.

“The King has just arrived in Naples,” was the answer.

“The King—King Umberto! But why has he come here?”

“He has come to look after all the poor sick people, and see what can be done for them;” and the nurse passed on to attend to her duties.

Peppuccio was astounded. He could not tell what to make of it. Had not so many of the richer people gone away lately that the better quarters of the city looked quite deserted, and the poverty in the poorer quarters was greater than ever, because there were so few “signori” left to give employment and alms? The poor could not run away from the cholera, but the rich could, and many of them had gone off into the country weeks ago. *Some* had remained in their suffering city, it

is true, and were spending money and time in the alleviation of the misery around them ; but among the runaways were doctors, who surely ought to have been among the last to leave a city where disease was raging, and where they might have been of so much use.

“ Why does the King come here, when the other great people are running away ? ” thought Peppuccio again. “ Why doesn't he stay at home in his beautiful palace, and keep out of the way of the cholera ? He may get it himself by coming here.”

And then he remembered a report that he had heard in his wanderings through the streets, a report which said that the Government had “ let loose the cholera,” in order to make more room in Naples by killing so many thousands of its inhabitants. It certainly did not seem as if the King had such cruel and selfish intentions, Peppuccio thought, or he would not come and expose his own life in this way.

But by this time the poor little boy was too exhausted to think any more ; the pain was not so bad now, but he felt tired and drowsy, and soon, in spite of all his trouble and perplexity, he fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER III

WHILE Peppuccio is enjoying the sleep he so much needs, we will just take a peep at the things that are going on in the city.

The terrible disease had been spreading more and more rapidly during the last few days ; in some cases all the inhabitants of a house had died ; the shops in the Toledo (the busiest street in Naples) were always closed at four o'clock in the afternoon now ; many of the smaller streets were almost deserted, and altogether, noisy, light-hearted Naples seemed to have become a city of the dead. And the change was much more striking than it would have been in one of our English towns, for the people of Naples are such merry, lively folks, that there is always an amount of noise and commotion going on that would astonish, and perhaps almost deafen you. Some of them, it is true, tried to shake off their anxiety, and appear as though they were not afraid of anything ; they would laugh and joke as if nothing were the matter, though when the cholera came nearer, and attacked themselves or their friends, you would have seen how much their courage was worth. But in general a terrible awe seemed to hang like a dark cloud over the

whole city. Great numbers of doctors and nurses worked hard day and night for the suffering people, yet all their labour went but a little way towards supplying the fearful need. You will understand this better when I tell you that it is thought that in one day and night alone nearly a thousand people died. Can we realise what that means? A thousand souls swept into Eternity within twenty-four hours in one city!

But, after such a dark picture, I will tell you of something a little more cheering.

Far away, in his palace in the North of Italy, King Umberto, or Humbert, as we call him in England, had been daily reading the reports of the terrible ravages the cholera was making in various parts of his kingdom, and most of all in poor, dirty, overcrowded Naples. And King Humbert's heart went out to his suffering people, and he longed to do something to help them. He could send money to them, and he did; but he felt that that was not enough; his own presence and personal sympathy would be worth more to them than money.

And so the King made up his mind that he would go to Naples himself, and do all he could for its plague-stricken inhabitants. He knew that in going there he was risking his own life, but was it not a king's duty to risk his life for his people? So King Humbert reasoned, and nothing could turn him from his purpose. It is said that his wife, Queen Margherita, was very anxious to

go with him, but *that* he would not allow. He was willing to risk his own life, but not hers.

It happened that some races were being held just then at a place called Pordenone. Is not that just a picture of what this world is—a scene of misery on the one hand, and merrymaking on the other? Oh, how well for us if we belong, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to a better place than this world!

Well, the races were just beginning, or about to begin, and King Humbert was asked to be present at them. What do you think his answer was?

“At Pordenone,” he said, “people are amusing themselves; at Naples people are dying. I shall go to Naples.”

Do *we* act every day in the spirit of King Humbert's words? If we ourselves have been saved by the Lord Jesus, we have been saved not only from our sins, but from “this present evil world,” and our Master said that as His Father had sent Him into the world, so He has sent us into the world. What was *He* sent into the world for? Was it to amuse Himself? I think the youngest of us can answer that question. And are *we* spending our time in amusing ourselves, or in seeking the salvation and blessing of poor, perishing souls around us?—perishing from a worse disease than cholera: you know the name of the disease, don't you?

I don't mean to say that children are never to play. Games and bodily exercise are good, not

only for the body, but also for the mind ; and the Good Shepherd does not forbid His lambs to frisk about a little, or expect them to behave like old sheep. But don't let amusement be the *chief* thing in your minds, dear children, who love the Lord Jesus. Let the great object of your lives be to please Him, and to be a help and blessing to others.

And even in your play you can glorify God your Father by never forgetting that you belong to Him ; by being gentle and unselfish towards your playfellows ; and also by never joining in anything that your conscience tells you He would not like.

And even a child can be the means of leading others to the Lord Jesus.

But if you have not yet been healed of the disease of sin yourself, it is of no use to talk about helping others ; you must go to the Good Physician, and get healing for yourself first of all.

So the King turned his back upon the races, and his face towards Naples, where he arrived on the afternoon of the eighth of September, 1884, the very day on which Peppuccio had been taken to the hospital. At the station he was met by his brother, Prince Amadeo, who had come from Turin to join him in his errand of mercy. Several of the chief men of the State, together with the principal authorities of Naples, were also waiting to receive their King.

King Umberto drove from the station to the palace in an open carriage, followed by three hundred other carriages. The streets through which he passed were decorated with flags, and filled with enthusiastic crowds, who had almost forgotten the cholera in their delight at the presence of their King.

“Viva il secondo padre della patria—Long live the second father of his country!” was shouted on all sides.

At last the palace was reached; King Humbert took up his abode for the present in the death-stricken city, and the same evening gave audience to the authorities, and consulted with them as to the best means of accommodating the sick, for the hospitals were terribly overcrowded. He gave orders that the Granile and Maddalena Barracks should be turned into cholera hospitals, and that the cavalry from the latter should for the present live in tents on a piece of open ground called the Campo di Marte, or Field of Mars.

Altogether the eighth of September was a day of excitement for Naples. Besides the great event of the King's arrival, there had been another event of a less pleasant nature; the sellers of sulphur-water (a favourite drink with Neapolitans) had made a riot because the police had not allowed them to sell their wares as freely as usual, on account of the cholera. The poor, ignorant people of the lower classes had no idea of being careful as to their food, but went on eating half-ripe or

decayed fruit, and all kinds of food that was likely to make them ill ; so the police had to look after their diet for them, and both buyers and sellers of the food in question used to get very angry at what they considered their interference ; for grown-up people, as well as children, do not always know what is good for them.

But, at last, night settled down on poor, unhappy Naples, bringing refreshing sleep and returning health to some, but disease and death to others, for during that night the terrible cholera stalked through the city, smiting down its victims in greater multitudes than ever before.

We all know how any very dreadful trouble that falls upon us is often a means of arousing our consciences, and making us feel our sins. It was so with thousands of the poor Neapolitans. They trembled at the thought of being struck down in their sins, and having to meet God ; but I am afraid that in most cases it was not true repentance, which is always connected with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, even though that faith may be very small. The fears of these poor people did not drive them to Him for the forgiveness of their sins, but to the Virgin Mary and the saints. I suppose very few of them had ever read the words of the Apostle Peter about the Lord Jesus :

“ Neither is there salvation in any other ; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved ” (Acts iv. 12).

They had no Bibles, poor things ; and, if they had had them, very few could have read them. Does it not grieve you to think of the sad, dark state in which such multitudes of your fellow-creatures are living and dying ? Perhaps, one day, God may send some of *you* out to poor, benighted Naples with His blessed message of peace and joy.

But I must tell you what the Neapolitans did when they felt so alarmed about the cholera, and so uncomfortable about their sins.

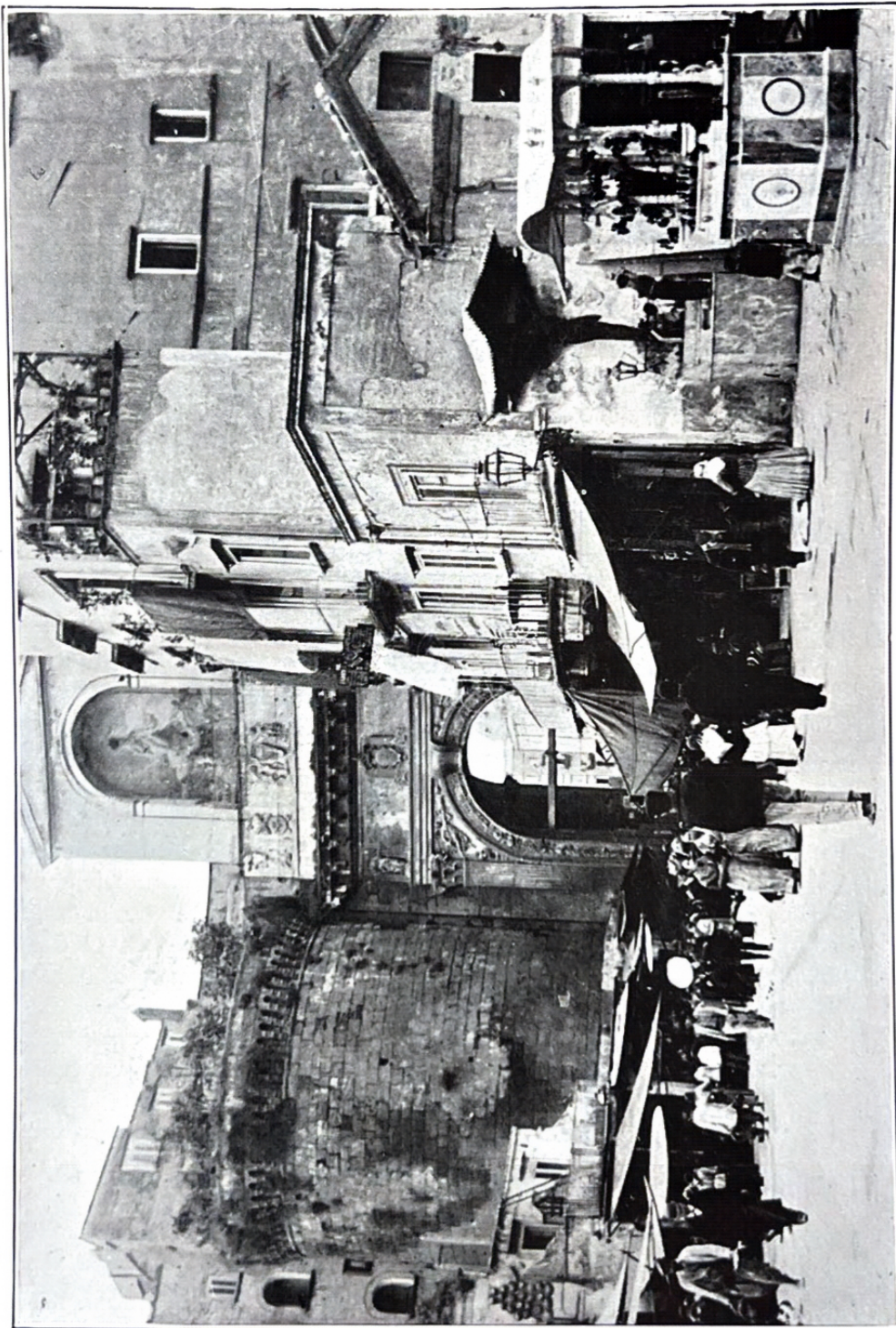
Five days before this, the image of San Genaro* had been carried in procession through the streets, in the hope that *that* would turn away the judgment of God from the city. But the ravages of the cholera had increased in violence instead of diminishing. The eighth of September, the day of the King's arrival, was a great day with the people of Naples, for it was the festival of the "Madonna Immacolata," or Spotless Lady (one of their names for the Virgin Mary). Surely she might be expected to honour her own day by pouring down a blessing upon the poor sufferers ! But no ! as I have told you, things grew worse and worse, so what *was* to be done ?

That they had not done enough yet to pacify the Madonna and the saints, the poor people were quite sure. So on the ninth they started some more processions. Images of saints were carried through the streets, accompanied by acolytes

* The patron saint, or special protector of Naples.

bearing wax tapers. A great number of women gathered together, and walked in procession. Strange, weird figures they looked, with their hair streaming wildly in the air, many of them clothed in rags, and crying and beating their breasts as they went. Some who were more in earnest than the rest crawled along upon their hands and knees, dragging behind them heavy stones, which were attached by cords to their necks, and they hoped by this display of humility and repentance to soften the heart of Mary, and induce her to take pity on them. Does not this remind you of the priests of Baal, who cut and wounded themselves so dreadfully in order to make their false god listen to their prayers, and of the poor Hindoos, who used to throw themselves on the ground, and allow the wheels of Jugger-naut's car to crush them to death? And yet these poor women all called themselves Christians!

You might have beheld many such scenes in Naples during the days in which the cholera was at its height. The shrines of saints which had formerly adorned the streets every here and there, but which had been walled up by the famous General Garibaldi in the year 1860, and the paintings whitewashed over, were now uncovered. Candles were burnt before them, and praying crowds knelt around. I said "praying," but I am afraid it was not what God would call praying, but only *saying prayers*, which is quite another thing.



A. F. G. Seaton, Lidgate Circus House

PORTA CAPUANA—ONE OF THE GATES OF NAPLES

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Suddenly a report spread through the city which caused the kneeling crowds to spring to their feet, and rush in feverish haste to one of the principal churches. What was the report? you ask. You will be surprised when I tell you. The Virgin Mary, they said, had come down upon the altar of this church to give her blessing to the people.

Soon a large crowd had assembled outside the doors of the church, but, to their dismay, they found them closed. They were determined, however, not to be shut out; they struggled, they shouted, they pushed, they hammered at the doors, and tried to break them open. At last a detachment of soldiers arrived upon the scene, and ordered the priests to open the doors to prevent a serious disturbance.

The moment they were opened, in rushed a seething mass of human beings, and threw themselves on their knees before the miraculous image, weeping, beating their breasts, and calling aloud to the Madonna to help them. She did not move, neither did she give them her blessing; but they went on worshipping her just the same, instead of turning to the One to whom she would have pointed them, had she really been present.

So the processions and the prostrations and the prayers went on, and no doubt Satan triumphed as he saw how strong were the chains with which he had bound the poor creatures—so strong that, though they had plenty of proof of the uselessness

of all their foolish ceremonies, they still clung to them as their only hope.

The King did all in his power to prevent these processions, for, of course, they only served to spread infection still more quickly by bringing so many people into close contact with each other; and I am glad to say that the Roman Catholic clergy stood by him in this, for they could not help seeing how foolish it would be to encourage them at such a time. But they had themselves put these wrong and silly ideas in the people's heads; they had led them on in their idolatry, and now all they could say or do was of little use.

Well might the poor Neapolitans be frightened at the cholera, for its victims were often struck down without a moment's warning. Some lingered for two or three days, and then died; others recovered; but many, very many, who were quite well and strong one moment, were seized with terrible agony the next, and died a few hours after.

A poor old woman, who kept a fruit stall at the corner of one of the squares, was suddenly taken ill while she was selling her fruit. She lay struggling on the ground in the greatest agony, but the people who passed by, instead of trying to help her, hurried away as fast as they could. Two men carrying a litter happened to be going by, and someone asked them to take her to the hospital in their litter, but they were as terrified as the rest, and refused, making the excuse that they

were on their way to fetch an officer. Just then the old woman's son came up, and he was so enraged at the men for refusing to carry his poor sick mother, that he rushed at them with his knife. The men dropped the litter and fled. After an hour's agony the poor creature died—died without anything having been done for her.

But, in the midst of all this terror and misery, the men and women of Naples still went on with the "Lotto." What is the Lotto? you will ask. It is a great lottery which is held every Saturday in one of the chief public buildings of Naples. There are a number of shops in which tickets are sold for this lottery, and the poor, foolish people save up their pence all through the week to buy tickets, sometimes even going without food in order to scrape enough money together. As Saturday draws near, they are in the greatest possible excitement, for they hope that if their ticket turns out to have the right number on it, they will make their fortunes.

They have a book called the "Smorfia," which professes to explain to them what number is represented by different things they may happen to see or dream about, and to tell them which are lucky, and which are unlucky numbers. Sometimes the monks pretend to tell them which numbers will succeed, and then the poor, deluded things rush off and buy a ticket with that particular number upon it.

Far more often than not, the number does not

happen to be the right one ; but their disappointment does not teach them a lesson ; there they are again at the following Saturday's drawing, and the next, and the next, all through their lives. And if they *do* happen to win a prize, they generally spend it on some foolish merrymaking and feasting which does them more harm than good, and leaves them as poor as ever. Besides this, there are often terrible disputes and fights about the Lotto, sometimes ending in bloodshed.

How much better it would be to go on steadily and quietly working for their living ! But there are many people even in our own dear country who try to grow rich through betting, card-playing, lotteries, and other kinds of gambling, instead of earning their living honestly. And many of them are people who have been brought up in a better way, and for whom there is far less excuse than for the poor, ignorant Neapolitans. God has given us health and strength in order that we may work and be of use, and not that we may waste time and money and mind over foolish games of chance, which never bring a blessing with them.

So infatuated were the Neapolitans with their favourite Lotto, that even the cholera did not cure them of their love for it ; indeed, a fresh outbreak of the disease, which took place on the night of the thirty-first of August, a few days before the King's arrival, seems to have been the effect of the Lotto. An event that had just

happened caused the superstitious people in crowds to draw the numbers 51, 52 and 94. As it turned out, these numbers all won prizes, and thus an immense number of the inhabitants found themselves suddenly enriched. So that evening there was an unusual amount of feasting and drinking in Naples, which was followed by a greater number of people being struck down with cholera than had been the case for some time.

We have been obliged to leave our friend Peppuccio, because I wanted to show you a little of what was going on in the poor, plague-stricken city during that terrible summer and autumn of 1884 ; but we will return to the hospital now, and see how he is getting on.

CHAPTER IV

IT was early in the afternoon of the second day of Peppuccio's illness ; the pain had been very bad all the morning, but was a little less intense now ; yet the weakness and weariness were almost as hard to bear as the pain, and the atmosphere of the crowded ward was particularly stifling just now in the hottest part of the day. The doctors and nurses did what they could for the comfort of the patients, but the hospital was so fearfully overcrowded that it was impossible for it to be anything but close and hot. Day after day so many sick people were brought in that there was no room for them in the wards, and some had to lie on the stairs. Just fancy what it must have been, in all that weakness and pain, to have no bed but the staircase !

Antonio, his new friend in the next bed, was asleep, and Peppuccio was sometimes dozing, sometimes going over the same train of thought that had occupied his mind the day before. Suddenly a commotion in the street outside aroused him thoroughly ; it was the same kind of noise that had startled him yesterday, but it was nearer and more distinct : the murmur of a multitude

of voices and the tramp of many feet told him that a large crowd was approaching the hospital, while more and more clearly the shouts of " Viva il Re—Long live the King ! "—were borne to his listening ears.

The noise awakened Antonio, who listened as eagerly as Peppuccio.

" What *can* it be ? " asked the little boy.

" Perhaps it is the King going away again," answered his friend ; " I shouldn't think he would want to stay here long, when he found what it was like ; perhaps he is on his way to the station."

Peppuccio thought this was very likely to be the case ; but somehow he felt greatly disappointed. Not that he had expected to see King Umberto, or to receive any benefit from his visit to the city, but it had been a pleasant thing to think that he was so near, and that he had come to do good to Naples. But while he was thus sorrowfully ruminating over King Umberto's departure he became conscious of an unusual commotion within the hospital itself ; the doctors and nurses were ranging themselves on each side of the passage leading from the entrance-door through the middle of the ward ; some of them were quickly smoothing their hair with their hands, or adjusting ties and aprons, while every face wore a look of excited expectancy.

And then suddenly they all began bowing with the greatest respect, as two gentlemen appeared in

the doorway. As they came forward, Peppuccio saw that there were a number of other gentlemen behind them ; but everybody's eyes seemed to be fixed on one of the two who had first entered. The little boy could not see him very clearly, because the doctors and nurses stood in the way, but he could just distinguish a pair of dark, searching eyes, which looked as though they could sometimes be severe, but which now were filled with sympathy and sorrow and tenderness. And, as he raised himself on his elbow to get a better view of the visitor, a murmur ran through the ward from bed to bed : “ È il Re—It is the King ! ”

The words seemed to thrill poor little Peppuccio through and through, and he was so excited that he could hardly keep from bursting into tears. Only to think of King Umberto coming to the hospital—the very hospital where he was—coming right into the midst of disease and infection, when he might have remained in ease and safety in his palace at home ! Peppuccio could not understand it at all.

And then, as he watched his sovereign come forward, accompanied by his brother (for he afterwards learned that the other gentleman was the King's brother, the Duke d' Aosta), a new thought flashed like lightning through his mind. Only yesterday he had said to himself that it was of no more use to hope that the Lord Jesus would look upon him and save him, than to think that

King Humbert would ever condescend to take any notice of him. And now he was in King Humbert's presence—King Humbert had come to the very place where he, poor little Peppuccio, was !

But, after all, that was not the same thing as *speaking* to him. The King had come to the hospital, it was true, and he was talking to some of the doctors and nurses, but he surely could not dare to hope that his Majesty would take any notice of *him* !

But the royal party were coming forward now, and, to Peppuccio's great surprise, the King stopped at the first bed he came to on the opposite side of the ward, and spoke to its occupant.

"The man in that bed must be somebody rather important," the little boy decided in his own mind—"someone that the doctors are telling the King about."

But, to his astonishment, King Humbert stopped in the same way at the next bed, and the next. Surely they could not all be important people ! Could it be possible then, that he might speak even to *him* ?

Peppuccio's heart beat wildly as his thoughts again went back to his decision of the previous day.

"If King Umberto takes any notice of me," he said to himself, "then I will believe that Jesus Christ will listen to me, and I will ask Him to save me."

Oh, how eagerly and impatiently Peppuccio watched and waited ! He felt as if the destiny of his soul hung upon the next few moments. The royal party drew nearer and nearer, and at last the King was standing by the bedside of an old soldier, who was known to be near death. His bed was the next but one to Peppuccio's, and the little boy could hear every word that was said. The soldier had served his King and country in many a hard-fought battle, and his breast was decorated with several medals as rewards for his courage ; for even on his death-bed the poor fellow could not bear to be without them.

King Humbert's face showed signs of deep emotion as he gently questioned the old soldier, and received his replies as to the battles in which he had fought and been wounded. In some of those battles the King had himself taken part, when he was Prince Umberto, and hence he felt all the more interest in the veteran who was now so near death, on a very different field. He made enquires as to his wife and children, and when he found that they were unprovided for, and that the poor fellow's heart was very heavy at the thought of their future, he instantly made a note in the pocket-book which he held in his hand.

“ Lay aside all care about them,” he tenderly said ; “ they shall be *my* care.”

Oh, the look of relief, of gratitude, of reverent love that beamed in the eyes of the dying man, as

with a heart too full for words, he feebly grasped his sovereign's hand, and pressed a fervent kiss upon it!

Then King Humbert passed on, feeling that, though he was powerless to stay the hand of death, he had at least enabled his faithful servant to die in peace, as far as care for the future of his family was concerned.

"To die in peace!" Did the poor soldier die in peace as to his soul? Had he peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ? That I cannot tell you. Oh, if only some one had been able to point him to Him who alone

"Can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are!"

King Humbert paused for a moment to look at the patient in the next bed, who seemed too ill to be conscious of his presence, and *then*—oh, how fast Peppuccio's heart beat at that moment!—then he stepped to the side of our little friend's bed.

"Well, my son, and how are you getting on? Getting better?"

"My son!" Only to think of the King himself not only speaking to him, but calling him "My son!"

The large, dark eyes gazed wistfully up into the kind face bending over him, but the little boy felt quite incapable of uttering a word.

"I think you look as if you had turned the

corner," the King went on to say. "I dare say you will soon be able to leave the hospital. You'll be glad to get back to father and mother, eh, little one?"

"I have no father or mother," stammered Peppuccio.

"Poor child!" and the same tender, sympathising look came into King Humbert's eyes that had filled them as he stood by the old soldier's bedside.

"Where do you live?"

"Nowhere;" and then the hot blood rushed to Peppuccio's cheeks, as he remembered that in his confusion he had not called the King "Your Majesty."

But the King did not seem to notice the omission.

"Have you no home at all, then?" he went on to say, "and no friends?"

"No, Maestà;" and then, gathering up his courage, Peppuccio added: "I sleep on the steps of a church, or under a boat; and I have no friends, except Antonio in the next bed; I didn't know him before I came here; but he is kind to me," and he looked across gratefully at Antonio, who was following the conversation with great interest.

"Is this Antonio?" asked the King, going round, and standing between the two beds.

"Maestà, sì—Yes, your Majesty," replied the poor man, pushing up, as a sign of respect, the

handkerchief which he wore bound round his head.

“ I suppose *you* have a home, my good fellow?”

“ Yes, your Majesty, though it is a very poor one.”

“ And have you any children ? ”

Antonio's face worked convulsively as he answered : “ Your Majesty, I had three, but the cholera has taken them all away, and my wife and I are left alone. I thought I was going too, a few hours ago, and I could see that the doctor thought the same ; and then what would have become of ‘ la poverina ? ’ ”*

“ Poor man ! but you are better now ? ”

“ Yes, your Majesty, and the sight of the face of my King has made me better still ; it has done me more good than all the medicine.”

The King smiled a kind, grave smile. Many a time had he had such words addressed to him since he had been in Naples. The poorer classes among its inhabitants had up to that time been very disinclined to think well of King Humbert and the royal family : they had been taught by their fathers, and also by their priests, that they had been far better off under their old race of kings, the Bourbons, and that King Humbert and his father, Victor Emmanuel, were nothing but usurpers and aliens, who had no sort of care for their Neapolitan subjects, and who ought to have remained satisfied with their own kingdom

* The poor thing.

of Piedmont. But the King's visit had turned the tide of popular feeling, and many of his former enemies were now the loudest in crying : " Long live the father of his country ! "

" I am glad you are better," King Humbert replied ; and then a bright, sudden smile flashed across his face, quite different from the grave one with which he had received Antonio's little speech.

" I have thought of a plan which would make both you and this little man happier," he said ; " and I have no doubt it will make your wife happier too. Your home must be very lonely now that the little ones are gone," and the smile gave place to a look of sorrow and sympathy.

" Yes, your Majesty, indeed it is. Poor Rosa and I can do nothing but cry as we look at their empty places."

" I can quite believe it. Well, now, you have an *empty* home, and this poor little fellow has *no* home."

The sick man grasped the King's meaning at once.

" Maestà, I will take him home with me. Rosa and I will take him as our own child instead of those we have lost."

" That's right ; that is what I meant," answered the King, and as he spoke, he took his purse from his pocket.

" I've no doubt he will grow up to be a help and comfort to you and the good Rosa," he said ;

“ but just at first he may cause you a little extra expense, so here is something to help you in feeding and clothing him,” and the King put into Antonio’s hand more money than it had ever held before.

The poor man, though he was generally rather loquacious, could hardly speak for tears at this unexpected gift, while Peppuccio lay gazing and listening with wide-open eyes and bewildered brain.

“ So this is to be your father, my child,” the King then said, turning to the little boy ; “ and you are to have a mother and a home too. Are you glad ? ”

“ Maestà, sì,” was all Peppuccio could say ; but his King read the gladness and the thanks in the dark, wistful eyes, and was satisfied.

If King Umberto wanted to go all through the hospital that afternoon, it would not do to spend so much time over each individual patient ; that was clear ; so, with a kindly nod and “ Good-bye,” he passed on. The old soldier and Peppuccio had specially aroused his interest, and he had spent so long over them that some of his suite were beginning to feel anxious about him ; so he only stopped for a kindly greeting or enquiry at each of the other beds, and then left the ward.

King Humbert was very fond of smoking, and some one wanted to give him a cigar, as usual, when he was setting out for his hospital visits, thinking, no doubt, that it would prevent his

being so much inconvenienced by the closeness of the wards ; but he refused, saying that the smoke might be disagreeable to the poor sick people.

He did not leave the Conocchia Hospital that afternoon without giving to those in charge a large sum of money to be spent for the benefit of the patients.

You may be sure that Peppuccio and his new father looked very lovingly and gratefully after the royal visitor as he left the ward ; and so did all the other patients, except those who were unconscious, or too ill to think about anything but their own sufferings.

When all was quiet again, Antonio turned to Peppuccio.

“ So you are my child now, little one,” he said. “ If it pleases God that we recover, and go out of the hospital, you will go home with me, and live with us in the place of the three whom the cholera took away. You understand what the King said, Peppuccio ? ”

“ Yes ; but do you really mean it ? Will you want me there ? ”

“ Of course ; didn't the King give you to me, and is it likely I should refuse his gift ? And he has given me money too, to help feed and clothe you. And I can tell you, figlio mio, the poor mother will be ready to welcome you ; for she is lonely enough without Renzuccio, and Angiolina and Squalino, though they gave her plenty

of trouble while they were alive, poor little dears!" and Antonio brushed away a tear as he spoke.

"Then may I call you 'father'?" asked Peppuccio, tremblingly; the thought of having a home and parents seemed almost too good to be true; he could hardly grasp it yet.

"Of course you may, little one. But I'm very tired now; I'll try and go to sleep, and you had better do the same." And with that Antonio turned his face the other way, and was soon fast asleep.

There was no sleep for Peppuccio: he was far too excited for that; but he was glad Antonio had left off talking, so that he might quietly think over the wonderful things that had taken place within the last hour. At first his mind was full of the King's kindness, and the new life that had opened up before him; but soon it went back to the subject which had occupied it before the King's visit—his sins and his need of salvation.

"It will be very nice to go and live with Antonio," he said to himself; "but I'm afraid I shall always be a naughty boy, and so I shall never be happy, and God will never love me."

But just at that moment there rushed into his mind the remembrance of the decision he had come to while the King was going through the ward. "If King Umberto takes any notice of me," he had said, "then I will believe that Jesus Christ will listen to me, and I will ask Him to save me."

And King Humbert had not only taken notice of him ; he had stood by his side and talked to him, oh, so kindly ! and he had given him a home and a father and mother, and provided means for his support.

Peppuccio hesitated no longer ; clasping his little thin hands together, he closed his eyes, and lifted up his heart to the Lord Jesus, whom he *now* believed to be willing to listen to him.

He had never prayed before ; he had now and then gabbled through a Paternoster or an Ave Maria without in the least knowing what they meant ; he had *said prayers*, but now he *prayed* for the first time in his life.

“ Lord Jesus,” he said, “ I know You are God, and You are a great King, much greater than King Umberto, and I am only a poor, wicked, little boy ; but King Umberto came and spoke to me, and was kind to me, and so I think perhaps You will listen to me, Lord.” And then he stopped, for he did not know what to say next. He knew what it was he wanted, but how was he to ask for it ? But he soon gathered up courage to go on.

“ I am a very wicked boy, Lord, and not worthy to speak to You ; I am a thief, and I have done many other bad things too ; I have never done anything good ; but, O God ! will You save me ? will You forgive me, and not let me be punished ? ”

And then he lay still, with closed eyes, waiting

for the answer. Poor little boy ! he half thought he should hear a voice speaking to him from heaven ; he could not understand how else an answer was to come. But it seemed as if heaven were closed against him, for no answer came. And he was beginning to feel very disappointed, and very heart-sick and weary, when some words flashed into his mind—words which he had heard long ago, but had since forgotten :

“ Christ died for our sins.”

“ Then, if He loved me enough to die for my sins,” he thought, “ surely He loves me enough to forgive me and save me now, or else it would have been no use for Him to die. Perhaps those words were the answer to what I asked Him just now ; only He spoke them into my heart instead of my ears.”

And once more he raised his heart to the One who was so close to him all the time.

“ Lord Jesus, I believe You died on the cross for my sins, so You must love me very much. I do thank you for it, and please, Lord, make me a good boy, for I want to please You, because You died for me.”

Peppuccio lay very still for a long time after this ; the nurses thought he was asleep, but it was only the stillness of joy, for Peppuccio knew now that the answer had come ; he had thanked the Lord Jesus for dying for him, and, as he did so, he knew that God had forgiven all his black sins, *because* Jesus had died for them. *How* that death

could save him, the little boy could not understand, for he had never read the Bible, or heard it explained, but he knew he *was* saved, and that God had told him so, and that was quite enough to fill his heart with joy.

And so, all through that evening of the ninth of September, 1884, while it is to be feared that most of those around him were still in darkness and the shadow of death, there was light—the light of God—in one little heart, and a constant stream of praise went up from that crowded hospital ward to the throne of God.

CHAPTER V

WHEN the sun arose over Naples the next morning, it shone upon just the same scene of disease and death. The King's kindness had, indeed, cheered the hearts of many, and it was hoped that his unwearied labours would bring about a change, but as yet there was no improvement in the health of the city ; indeed, there were more cases of illness and more deaths during this night and day than ever before. But God was going to have mercy upon the plague-stricken city ; the turn was to come soon, and no doubt King Humbert and his helpers were instruments in His hands for bringing it about.

The King's ministers were very anxious about his remaining at Naples, and begged him to leave that evening ; they thought he had done all that could be expected of him ; the cholera was increasing, and who could tell whether he might not be its next victim ? But Humbert firmly refused ; the greater the sufferings of his people, the greater the need for him to remain amongst them. And so he stayed on.

That day he walked through the whole of the Mercato Quarter on foot. The Mercato was the part of the city in which the greatest number of

deaths had taken place. It was the same quarter in which we first met our little friend Peppuccio—the most historical part of Naples, but generally historical for its miseries. He also inspected the military hospitals and encampments, and gave orders for ambulances to be opened at several of the Government offices, and at Castel dell' Uovo. The Castel dell' Uovo is so called because it is something like an egg in shape. It is a very ancient building, and stands on a rock which juts out into the sea. At one or two of the hospitals he was met by the Archbishop of Naples, who walked by his side through the wards.

There was one thing the King was anxious to do, and that was to visit the “fondaci.” But I must tell you what the fondaci were. There are miserable homes enough in London, but I think there can be nothing to come up to some of the homes of Naples. I am afraid you will think I am telling you of nothing but miseries; but, if hearing about them is sad, what must it be to live in the midst of them? And yet I am not telling you the worst; some of the dwellings of these poor creatures are too dreadful to be described.

Well, to enter a fondaco, you go through an arched doorway into a yard, which has been compared to the bottom of a dried-up well, so close and dark is it. This courtyard is surrounded by the most miserable dwellings you can imagine. They consist of tiny rooms in which one small hole serves for both door and window, so you may

think how dark they are, and how stifling the atmosphere is ! The upper rooms are reached by broken-down steps, which scarcely retain any resemblance to a staircase, and as you mount them you are in danger of tumbling over heaps of dirt that lie in the way. If you enter one of the dark, filthy little dens called rooms, you will very likely find that it is inhabited by several families, while it is a rare thing indeed to find one occupied by less than six or eight people. The dirt, the bad smells, and the insects are enough to make one shudder. And yet thousands of our fellow-creatures have no other home than this. Here multitudes of little children are brought up, sleeping at night on the floor, or in groups of six or seven on one small, dirty mattress, and going out by day to see what castaway rubbish, in the way of food, they can pick up, or, in many cases, what they can steal.

As you may easily imagine, these fondaci were just the places in which the cholera found most victims, for if people live crowded together in the midst of dirt, and with scarcely any fresh air and very little food, they fall an easy prey to infectious diseases. One could hardly expect much cleanliness or common sense from people so terribly poor as the inhabitants of these fondaci, but there are many people living in fairly comfortable homes in our own dear old England who have very little idea of the value of fresh air and soap and water in keeping away disease.

As I told you, King Humbert was anxious to visit some of these fondaci ; he wanted to see and sympathise with his poor subjects in their lowest and worst condition. Some of those around him remonstrated, but in vain. The King insisted, and had stepped out of his carriage for the purpose of going into one of them, when someone in the crowd called out in a resolute voice :

“ You have no right to commit suicide, neither have you any right deliberately to kill many of these unfortunate people, who will continue to follow you into that hot-bed of pestilence.”

Rather bold words to speak to a King, were they not ? But sometimes it is a real kindness to speak bold, firm words, even at the risk of giving offence. King Humbert was not offended ; he was brave, but not foolhardy ; and when he saw that by persisting in his intention he would cause great anxiety to many of his people, and lead some of them into danger, he yielded. So he simply bowed, and stepped back into his carriage.

But though he did not visit the fondaci, the King found plenty to do with his time and his money. He had already given the sum of 100,000 lire for the relief of the sufferers, besides smaller sums given during his visits to the hospitals, as we have seen.

The next day he issued strict orders that there were to be no more religious processions ; for they were only likely to spread the infection, instead of

putting an end to the cholera, as the poor, superstitious people fondly hoped they might do. I am afraid I cannot say that the order was thoroughly obeyed, for the people were too firmly rooted in their foolish ideas to be very ready to yield, and it was difficult to enforce the order in such a time of distress and confusion. Still, there can be no doubt that much good was done by this and other wise changes introduced by the King. He continued his visits to the hospitals and encampments, and before that day (September 11th) was ended he had the satisfaction of learning that the cholera was decreasing in violence ; there were still an immense number of people taken ill, but the deaths were fewer.

How glad he must have been to send the news to his wife, Queen Margherita, who was staying at Monza, near Milan, and to whom he sent ten telegrams every day during his visit to Naples !

Another good result of the King's visit soon manifested itself. Many of the Neapolitan nobility who had fled from the cholera now returned to their homes, doubtless feeling ashamed when they contrasted their own conduct with that of their King.

In some cases the churches had to be used as hospitals, so overcrowded was every available space ; but there was one priest who refused to allow the poor sick people to be brought into his church. King Humbert had him promptly arrested, as well as a doctor who refused to attend

patients in a cholera hospital. He had no notion of people who had the power to help their suffering fellow-creatures holding back from their duty.

Meanwhile, wooden huts were being erected for use as temporary hospitals, and old omnibuses were covered with black, and turned into hearses, for which there was only too great need.

But what has become of Peppuccio all this time ? We must not forget him, must we ?

Well, I am sure you will be glad to hear that he and his new father progressed so favourably that, on the morning of the eleventh of September, the doctor pronounced them well enough to leave the hospital. They were still rather weak and shaky ; but cholera, though a violent and dangerous disease, is soon over, if the patient recovers, and there were so many new patients constantly being brought in, that it was impossible to keep any of the old ones till they were quite strong again. Many were the beds left vacant by death during the few days they had been there, but they were always filled again directly.

King Humbert had mentioned to the Sister in charge of the ward his arrangement about Peppuccio, for he wanted to ensure the carrying out of Antonio's promise. So she arranged that they should leave together, and took down Antonio's address, in order that he and his charge might be looked after a little by and by, when there was more time to spare. But, judging by appearances, it was to be feared that time was yet

far distant, and that they must trust to Antonio to fulfil his engagement without any supervision. It is most probable that the Sister, by the time she *did* get a little more leisure, had quite forgotten her little patient, for it is certain that neither she nor any one else from the hospital, ever put in an appearance at Antonio's home.

Can you fancy you see the pair of them, both very pale and very thin, descending the hospital steps, Peppuccio's hand tightly clasped in that of his new father? Antonio had already told Peppuccio that he lived in that quarter of Naples called the Vicaría, because it surrounds the celebrated prison of that name. Naples abounds in prisons; a great deal has been done for its inhabitants in the way of punishing them, but very little in the way of showing kindness to them. He had told him, too, that the lane in which his home was situated was called "Vico del Settimo Cielo," which means "Lane of the Seventh Heaven." The little boy was not as much struck by the name as you and I might have been, nor did he imagine that, because it had such a heavenly name, it must necessarily be a kind of Paradise. He was quite accustomed to such names, and he knew that the places bearing them were often exactly the opposite of what the name implied. But he was very eager to see his new home, and especially his new mother. Antonio, however, thought it necessary to give him a word of warning, which somewhat damped his spirits.

“ You must not be too sure of finding ‘ la mamma’ there,” he said ; “ we can’t tell what the cholera may have done in these few days. It is just as likely as not that she is dead, and all the neighbours too.”

This was said in a very quiet tone, but Antonio did not really feel calm at all. He had been so full of joy at the idea of going home and seeing his wife again, that until the last few moments he had not thought of the possibility of not finding her ; but the idea had just struck him, and he at once communicated it to Peppuccio, trying to speak calmly, lest he should frighten him.

Tears rushed to the little boy’s eyes, as he fixed them wistfully on his companion, but he said nothing.

“ Don’t cry, little one,” Antonio said, in answer to that look ; “ I hope the Madonna has preserved her alive ; she surely could not have the heart to take *her* away, as well as the children ! ”

Poor Antonio’s voice grew very husky as he spoke, and Peppuccio gave his hand a loving squeeze of sympathy.

“ God loves us so much, father,” he said, after a moment’s pause—“ God loves us so much, that I am sure He hasn’t let anything happen that would not be good for us. Since He forgave me my sins I feel so sure that He loves me, that I don’t seem to be frightened any more.”

“ But I don’t see how you can know that He has forgiven your sins, my child. It must make

you very happy to think so, but, as I told you yesterday, I never heard anybody else say such a thing ; and, somehow, I don't think the priests would like to hear you say it. It doesn't seem right to me, and I think you had better not talk to other people about it."

"Oh, father!" answered the little boy, lovingly looking up into his face, "how I wish I could explain it to you! I know it's true, only I don't know how to show you what I mean."

All this time they were threading their way through narrow, dirty streets which I need not describe to you, for we accompanied our little friend through others of the same kind at the beginning of our story. Here and there they crossed a wider, cleaner street, but only to plunge again into a labyrinth of horrible lanes.

At last the Lane of the Seventh Heaven was reached ; it was so narrow, and the houses on each side of it so high, that all that could be seen of the sky was a very narrow streak, which seemed, oh, *such* a long way off ! Yes, heaven seemed very far away from that lane, in spite of its beautiful name. But we know that *God* was not far off ; indeed, He was sending a little messenger, who should carry the glad tidings of His love and mercy even to the poor creatures who lived in such an abode of misery.

Antonio slackened speed as he walked up the lane ; he had not been going very fast before, certainly—he was too weak for that ; but now he

was so filled with dread lest he should not find his wife at home to greet him, that he felt inclined to put off, as long as he could, the moment which would either crush all hope out of his heart, or cause it to leap with joy. But Peppuccio was all eagerness to reach his new home, and he ran along as fast as his own weakness and Antonio's fears would allow him, dragging his new father by the hand.

“ Stop, Peppuccio, here we are ! ” said Antonio at last, and the two halted before a very grim-looking, tumble-down sort of building, hardly worthy of the name of a house. They entered the open door, and then Antonio paused.

“ You go up first, my son, ” he said ; “ go to the first door on the third floor, and see whether she is there ; if she is not, may God have mercy on me ! ” and he reeled back, and leaned against the wall for support. No one came out of any of the rooms to see who was there ; perhaps the people were gone out, or perhaps they were all dead !

Peppuccio's first impulse was to run back to Antonio when he saw him stagger like that, but, knowing that it was suspense that was so strongly affecting the poor man, he thought the best thing for him to do would be to make all possible haste to find out the truth. So upstairs he went. He felt quite exhausted by the time he had mounted the three long flights of broken steps, and was obliged to pause for breath at the top.

The door of Antonio's room stood ajar. Peppuccio pushed it a little farther, and, peeping in, discovered a middle-aged woman sitting on a chair near the window, fast asleep. His cry of joy awoke her, and she started to her feet.

"Who are you, child, and what is the matter?" she asked in a quick, nervous sort of way.

"I am Peppuccio," was the little fellow's only answer.

"But what do you want?"

"I've come with father; he is waiting downstairs."

"But who is your father, and what has he come for?"

Poor Peppuccio hardly knew what to say. At last he stammered out, "He is Antonio, your husband."

The poor woman turned deadly pale.

"My husband!" she gasped; "he is dead; they took him to the hospital four days ago; he had the cholera. And you said it was your father. What do you mean, child? Speak!" And in her anxiety she seized the little boy's arm so tightly that he could hardly help crying out with the pain.

"Come downstairs and see him," he replied; and he led the way, followed eagerly by the poor, bewildered woman.

"Here she is, father!" he shouted, as soon as he came within sight of Antonio, who was still leaning against the wall, just as Peppuccio had left him; "she's alive after all."

Antonio staggered forward, and nearly fell to the ground, but Rosa, as soon as she discovered the figure of her husband, rushed past the little boy, and was just in time to catch the poor, half-fainting man in her arms.

“ Antonio, marito mio—my husband ! ” she cried, and then burst into a flood of tears.

“ Rosa mia, I was afraid I should find *you* gone, as well as the little ones.” And then they went upstairs together, Rosa supporting her husband, and not relaxing her hold till she had safely landed him in their own little room.

“ You had better lie down on the bed, caro mio (my dear), ” she said, “ for I see that the cholera has not left you much strength.”

Antonio did as he was told, for indeed he was sadly in need of rest. His wife seated herself on a chair by his side, anxious to hear all he had to tell; for the moment both had forgotten poor Peppuccio, who had silently followed them upstairs, and now stood shyly leaning against the door.

“ But, Antonio, I never expected to see you again, after you had been taken to the hospital. They always say no one ever comes out alive, and I had quite given you up for lost ; ” and Rosa sat and surveyed her new-found husband with the greatest astonishment as well as delight.

“ Yes, we always said so, ” Antonio answered, “ but I think we made a mistake. A good many others came out alive besides me ; and they were really kind to me there.”

“ I told the little boy you were dead, when he said you were downstairs,” Rosa went on ; “ but, Antonio, where is the child, and who is he ? ” She turned her head, and discovered Peppuccio standing behind her, and looking, as he felt, very awkward and uncomfortable.

“ Come here, my son,” said Antonio, holding out his hand. The child went towards him, and laid his little brown hand confidingly in his, but looked round anxiously and enquiringly at Rosa ; he felt rather uncertain as to how she would welcome him. Antonio would not let go his hand, but kept him there by his side, while he told his wife the story of the King’s visit to the hospital, and the way in which he had given Peppuccio to him.

“ So you see, Rosa mia,” he concluded, “ I have brought you back something besides myself. You thought you had lost me as well as the children ; but now you have got me back, and a child as well. I know you will be glad to take Peppuccio as your child instead of Renzuccio ; he must be just about his age, too.”

Rosa was in tears before her husband had finished speaking.

“ Come to me, figlio mio,” she said, in a choking voice, and stretched out both arms towards the little boy, and in another moment he was folded tightly in her arms, and a mother’s kisses rained upon his face. And when he ventured to look up, and saw the depth of love

in those tearful eyes, he, too, flung his arms round her neck, and kissed her over and over again. Rosa's was a plain, almost an ugly face, but oh, how beautiful it looked to the orphan child whom she had so willingly taken to her heart !

“ You are very much like my Renzuccio,” she said, when at last she could trust herself to speak. “ Yes, almost exactly the same ! ” and again she kissed his upturned face.

I am afraid Rosa made a slight mistake in saying that Peppuccio was just like her lost child, for, to tell the truth, poor little Renzuccio had been the ugliest child in the whole lane ; he squinted dreadfully, was deeply marked with smallpox, and had a very crooked nose, whereas Peppuccio was a particularly pretty child. So she was hardly paying our little friend a compliment, was she ?

However, if it pleased the good Rosa to think there was a likeness between the two children, we will not quarrel with her about it, especially as she felt all the more strongly drawn to welcome and love the newcomer. And, besides, it does not so very much matter after all, whether we are pretty or ugly ; the plainest face may be beautiful if we see love and kindness and truth shining out of it, while the prettiest may be spoilt by an expression of ill-temper or vanity.

But now it dawned upon the kind-hearted Rosa that her husband and Peppuccio must be hungry.

“ If you give me some of that money the King gave you, Antonio,” she said, “ I will go and get something for supper. I have scarcely been able to earn anything while you were away, for I have been very bad with ‘ freb ’ ;* I had not a soldo left in the house when you came in, and I have had nothing to eat all day.”

“ Poveretta mia ! ” exclaimed her husband, “ that was what I was afraid of, that you would be starving. But the fever is better now, isn’t it ? ”

“ Ringraziamo Iddio ! ” was her answer, which meant, “ Let us thank God,” and was the same as saying, “ Yes, I am better.”

“ Anna, down below, has been kind to me, and often given me food,” she went on to say ; “ but now her two children have the cholera, and she is almost out of her mind with grief.”

“ Poor things ! ” murmured Antonio, as he handed a lira to his wife ; and then she went out to buy the supper.

Meanwhile, Peppuccio had gone to the window to look out. A fire was burning in the lane a little way from their door ; these fires were kept constantly burning by the authorities, in order to purify the air. A woman stood by it, warming a ragged blanket, and then another woman came out of the house opposite, with two or three equally ragged articles of clothing, which she also proceeded to warm, exchanging, meanwhile, a few words with her neighbour. Peppuccio knew only

* The Neapolitan way of pronouncing “ febbre,” fever.

too well what it meant. Both of them had the cholera in their homes. One woman's face was swollen with weeping, the other looked cold and hard, and full of despair.

The first soon rolled up her blanket to keep the heat in it, and hurried in at the door of Antonio's house ; and then Peppuccio concluded that she must be Anna, of whom his new mother had just spoken.

The blanket was to wrap her children in, for the cholera made them so cold, poor little things ! If you could have peeped into her little room, you would have seen her hurry in with the blanket, and roll the children up together in it ; for she had not a second for them. They had nothing else over them but ragged clothes.

But it was not long before the eldest had the blanket all to itself, for, before an hour had gone by, the sufferings of the youngest had ceased, and the poor, weeping mother had to lay its little body in the farthest corner of the room, which, however, was so near that she could not help brushing it with her dress as she attended to the living child.

Meanwhile, Rosa had come in with the supper, which consisted of macaroni flavoured with grated cheese and preserved tomatoes. She generally made the macaroni herself, but this time she was anxious to give some food to her hungry ones as soon as possible ; and, indeed, she was feeling the need of it herself.

When supper was over, she took down a plateful to Anna, who had often supplied *her* wants when she was able. Rosa saw then that the baby could not last long, and stayed with its mother till the end came. Then she went out, taking with her some of the money King Humbert had given to her husband, and bought with it some tall candles and a wreath of artificial flowers. When she returned, she stood the candles round the little dead body, and set light to them, and then placed the wreath on its head. You will ask what good the wreath and the candles could do to the poor dead baby, and I am sure I cannot tell you. The candles are always kept burning round a corpse till it is buried ; the wreath is not considered quite so necessary, but Rosa had brought it because she thought it would please and comfort the poor mother.

What a comfort it would have been to them both to know that the dear little baby had gone straight to its loving Saviour, and needed no candles to light it on its way !

CHAPTER VI

ON the afternoon of the fourteenth of September King Humbert left Naples. He was to pass through Rome, and he knew that the Romans were preparing a demonstration in his honour ; but the King felt in no mood for demonstrations after all the misery he had just been witnessing. With the groans of his poor Neapolitan subjects still ringing in his ears, how could he listen with any pleasure to the welcoming shouts and acclamations of his less afflicted Roman people ?

So he sent a telegram, asking that no display might be made, for his heart was still full of the thought of the sorrows of Naples.

But his subjects seemed to find it impossible to carry out his wish, and all through his journey he was greeted by the most enthusiastic outbursts of affection and loyalty. The welcome he received at Rome was something tremendous ; and, though a very large number of the inhabitants of that city sided with the Pope, who was by no means friendly with King Humbert, yet on this occasion the ill-feeling seemed to be forgotten, and people of all classes joined in shouting " Vivas "

to their King, and expressing their admiration of his noble conduct.

But now we take leave of King Humbert, and return to our little Peppuccio.

The shades of evening were closing in upon Naples, when a strange-looking figure issued from the door of the tumble-down house in the Lane of the Seventh Heaven. He was attired in a shirt and a pair of trousers turned back above his knees—nothing more. On his head he carried a large basket made of rushes, and on the basket three shining copper vessels. Under the centre one smoked and spluttered a fire in a tiny stove ; what the side-vessels contained we shall see by and by. The basket, pans, and fire were surmounted by an arch formed of a brightly polished brass rod, and from this arch hung little chains, medals, and images of saints. On the top of all this burnt a small lamp to light the steps of the man underneath, and to show off the beauties of his travelling shop.

As we look at him more closely, we discover that this curious figure is none other than our old friend Antonio, and in the little boy who runs out of the house after him we quickly recognise Peppuccio.

Three days have passed since Antonio left the hospital, and he has resumed his old trade of “maruzzaro.”

What is a maruzzaro ? you will ask. Well, we will take a peep into one of his copper pans. What

are those queer-looking things, soaking in broth ? Would you like to taste them ? Antonio will be only too pleased to supply you. Give him a half-penny, and he will, with Peppuccio's help, produce a slice of bread from one of the portions of his lofty head-dress, place it in a little bowl or saucer, and then, with a tin ladle, he will pour upon it some of the broth and some of the funny brown things contained therein. If you taste the delicacy before I tell you what it is, perhaps you will like it ; if I tell you first, I'm afraid you will feel disposed to throw it away, or hand it back to Antonio, even at the risk of losing your half-penny. Shall I tell you what the mysterious things are ? *Snails !* Maruzzaro is the Neapolitan word for snail-seller. I fear you don't much admire the new trade your friend Peppuccio is learning. But I can assure you that snails are considered quite a delicacy by the people of Naples, and that Peppuccio is very proud of the line of business in which he has embarked. Rosa has sliced up the bread for them, and helped make the snail broth, and now they are taking it out in time for people's supper. It will most likely be very late before they return.

They walked pretty quickly through the smaller streets, only stopping when they were hailed by a customer with an " Ohè, maruzzaro ! " but when they reached a square out of which several streets opened, Antonio came to a standstill. Then, after trying his voice for a moment, he

began singing a song in praise of his wares. There was something very melancholy about the sound, though he had a nice voice. As he stood turning round and round, so as to let his voice be heard in all directions, his somewhat lengthy chant rang through the air very mournfully. Yet Antonio did not feel particularly sad ; he only sang in that mournful fashion because it is the custom with snail-sellers so to do. Peppuccio had not learned the song yet, but no doubt he would soon pick it up, and his voice was so clear and sweet that it would be likely to attract customers.

Gradually they worked their way as far as the " Molo," or quay, to which we accompanied Peppuccio the morning we first made his acquaintance, and here they stood for a few moments to enjoy the view of the bay, for, though they had seen it so often, they were not tired of it yet. It was indeed a lovely sight—the calm, smooth waters softly plashing at their feet, and, in the distance, grand old Vesuvius sending out every now and then flashes of flame, which lit up the whole bay with a strange, weird light, and brought into view the islands which lay buried in the shadows of night.

" Oh, father ! how good it was of God to give us such a beautiful bay ! " said the little boy in a low hushed voice, as he stood and drank in the beauty of the scene.

But, though Antonio had stopped for a moment to admire it, his thoughts had by this time gone

back to his snails and the soldi he hoped to make by them, so Peppuccio received no reply beyond a grunt and the words—

“Come, child ; we must not lose our time here.”

So, with a little sigh, Peppuccio followed his father down a long street, in which they found quite a number of customers.

At last the snails were all sold except a few which would do for their own supper, and then they began to hurry homewards.

On their way they passed a small building, which was lighted up, and from which the sound of singing proceeded. It was not a church. What could it be ? Peppuccio had often passed it before, but not when it was open, and so it had not attracted his attention.

“What is that place, father ? ” he asked.

“Nun saccio—I don’t know,” was Antonio’s answer, spoken in a very indifferent tone.

“But look, there are two boys just going in, and the singing sounds so beautiful ; let us go in, father.”

“But it is late, Peppuccio ; besides we don’t know what sort of place it is.”

“Oh, but do come just for a minute, father ! ” urged the little boy, seizing Antonio’s hand, and trying to drag him in by main force. “You can put the basket down inside.”

“Well, we will just see what it is like,” said the maruzzaro at last ; and the two went in together.

They found themselves in a small hall, very

plainly fitted up, and with its walls hung with Scripture texts. A man with an earnest, kindly face was standing at a desk at the further end of the room, and was just beginning to read from a small book which he held in his hand, for the singing had left off by this time. About twenty people, most of them poor, like Peppuccio and his foster-father, were seated on the wooden benches in front of the speaker. A man standing near the door showed them into a seat, and they sat down, looking around them with wonder and curiosity.

But suddenly a sentence read by the preacher riveted Peppuccio's attention.

"Christ died for our sins."

His text! The one that had brought peace and joy into his poor little troubled heart! Peppuccio did not look about the room any longer; his dark eyes were fixed on the speaker, his hands tightly clasped together, and he leaned forward, with his lips apart, anxious to drink in every word. Now at last he was going to hear more about the good news, which he had but vaguely taken in before, and yet which had made such a vast difference to him.

Then he suddenly remembered Antonio: he, poor little Peppuccio, had not been able to explain it to him aright; but now—*now*—no doubt the wonderful words would be explained in the right way, and all would become clear to the dear, new father. So Peppuccio nudged him and whispered,

“ Listen, father, it is just what I was trying to tell you ; the gentleman will make it all plain.”

And Antonio listened. It was something perfectly new to him also, but it did not make the impression on him that Peppuccio hoped it would do. The maruzzaro thought it all very strange and very wonderful. He felt that he would like his wife to hear it too, but it was only like a pleasant song in his ears ; it did not reach his heart at all. Why was this ? Ah ! why is it the same with many of *you* when you hear God’s Word ? This was the reason in Antonio’s case, and perhaps it may be the same with you. Antonio *had never felt himself to be a lost sinner. Have you ?* He would have owned no doubt that he was a sinner ; he had been taught that by his priests, but what the word “ sinner ” meant he had never realised.

And so, while little Peppuccio was learning from the preacher’s earnest words *how* it was that the death of the Lord Jesus was enough to put away all his sins, and how He had not only died, but risen again, showing that the sins were quite put away for ever out of God’s sight—while Peppuccio was learning in some little measure to understand this, and getting every moment more settled in his faith, every moment happier in having such a Saviour, Antonio was listening with a smile on his face—listening, but not taking a word of it to himself.

But all at once the preacher paused, and it

seemed as if he fixed his eyes full upon the maruzzaro.

“ But perhaps there is one here who does not feel his need of this great salvation,” he said. “ I know that some of you have been aroused to a sense of your need ; I know that some of you are seeking the Saviour, and crying out, with tears, ‘ Oh, that I knew where I might find Him ! ’ It is to you, dear anxious, seeking souls I have been speaking to-night ; I have been trying, with God’s help, to show you that the Good Shepherd has long been seeking *you* ; that He is showing to *you*, as He did to His disciples long ago, the marks which tell how He suffered and died for you ; which tell how that work is finished for ever, and that there is nothing left for you to do but simply trust Him ; I have been telling you that He says to you, ‘ Why are ye troubled ? ’

“ But to you who are not yet seeking Him, what shall I say ? Does the Saviour say to *you*, ‘ Why are ye troubled ? ’ No, indeed, there is plenty of reason for you to be troubled. God has been doing a great deal to trouble you lately ; He has been calling very loudly to you.

“ Oh, friends, how many a death-bed have I stood by these last few weeks ! ” The preacher’s voice trembled as he spoke, and the tears gathered in his eyes. “ How many souls have I seen swept into Eternity ! Some, thank God ! have gone to be with that blessed One who loved them and gave Himself for them ! but others—oh, friends !

how my heart has been wrung with agony as I have watched while the spirit left the poor suffering body—going out into the darkness, Christless, hopeless !

“ No doubt most, if not all, of you have been robbed of dear ones by this dreadful disease.” Here many a sigh and exclamation of sorrow from his audience told that his surmise was but too true. “ Some of you,” he went on to say, “ some of you have passed through it yourselves.”

The smile had died away from Antonio’s face long before this ; and now, as the preacher’s words reminded him of his own recent illness, his face grew more and more serious, and he listened with the most earnest attention.

“ Yes, you have been lying at the very gates of death !” the preacher continued. “ God has given you a glimpse into Eternity, and then sent you back to earth to prepare for that Eternity. He has spared *you*, while thousands have fallen around you. And what have you been doing with your spared life ? You have been spending it for self and Satan ; you have turned a deaf ear to God’s solemn warning, and now, though you are listening to His Word, perhaps even enjoying listening to it, you are still at a distance from Him, you are still choosing your own way, and I dare not say to *you*, ‘ Why are ye troubled ? ’ No, I cry rather from the depths of my heart : ‘ May God trouble you to-night ! ’ May conscience at last awake, and give you no rest till you find it

in the Lord Jesus—in Christ, who ‘died for our sins!’”

Antonio began to shift uneasily; he did not like such plain speaking; it seemed as if it were all meant for him. He would have liked to go out, but he dared not. What if this were indeed God’s message to him, and if God were to ask him one day how he had received it?

“How is it you can sit there and listen without taking the good news into your hearts?” the speaker continued, in yet more earnest tones; “how can you listen so coolly and comfortably to the offer of *such* a salvation? I will tell you how it is. You have never felt your need; you have never felt what it is to be a sinner. ‘Oh, yes!’ you will say, ‘I know I am a sinner; of course we are all sinners.’ Friends! a man who truly sees his sinfulness—a man who truly repents, does not say, ‘We are all sinners.’ No, his feeling is, ‘I am the sinner—*I—I*’—just as if he were the only sinner in the world—the only one who had rebelled against God and served the devil.

“You need to be brought face to face with God. The prophet Isaiah was brought face to face with God, and what did he say when he found himself there? Was it ‘We are all sinners?’ No, his cry was, ‘Woe is me, for *I* am undone!’ The Apostle Peter was brought face to face with God, and he fell at His feet, crying, ‘Depart from me, for *I* am a sinful man, O Lord!’

“I know it is a hard lesson, and one we are

very slow to learn ; many of us refuse to learn it when things are going well with us, and so God has to send sorrow to teach it to us. There was a poor widow once whom God taught this lesson. He sent her one sorrow after another. First her husband died. What a blow that must have been ! But it seems she did not learn her sinfulness from that, or at any rate, did not acknowledge it. Then God sent a famine, and she and her son were nearly starved to death ; but she did not bow even then, so hard and proud are our hearts ! Then God tried her with kindness : would *mercy* bring her to confess her sin ? Just as the poor starving creature was going out to pick up a few sticks to light a fire, and bake a cake for herself and her boy out of the very last handful of meal she had in the house, and fully expecting to lie down and die when that was eaten—just at that moment God sent one of His servants to tell her that as long as the famine lasted her meal should hold out, and so should the oil with which she kneaded it into bread. Here was good news ! But did the good news break her down ? The man of God took up his abode in her house, and there was always plenty of food for the three of them, though there was nothing but famine around. Did this great mercy lead her to repentance ? Did the constant presence and teaching of God's servant work that which trouble had failed to accomplish ? No. There was only one means left, and that was *death*. Death had knocked at the

door of her home once before, but it had not bereft her of *all*; she had her son left, and as long as she had him she still held out.

“But the day came when her son died, and now it all came out! ‘What have I to do with thee, thou man of God?’ she cried; ‘art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?’

“‘*My sin!*’ Ah, that was the confession that had to come out; and though her words were wild and bitter words, she was not reproved. No, God is a tender, pitiful God, and, as soon as she had owned her sin, He was ready to shower down His blessings upon her. Her son was raised from the dead, and given back to his mother’s loving embrace. Don’t you think, friends, that as she folded her darling once more in her arms, alive from the dead, her heart rose up in thankfulness to the God who had sent her such bitter sorrow in order to clear away that which had stood, year after year, as a barrier between her and Himself, even her unconfessed sin?

“And with repentance came faith, for the two always go together. ‘*Now by this I know,*’ she said to the prophet—‘now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.’ (1 Kings xvii.)

“Perhaps,” continued the preacher, “there is one among my hearers this evening who is like this woman. The sight of the *glory* of the Lord caused Isaiah to see his own uncleanness; the sight of

His *goodness* as well as His power brought Peter to His feet ; but neither mercy nor glory drew that poor widow ; *death* was needed for that.

“ My friend, death has been at work in *your* home ; the cholera has taken away your wife, it may be, or perhaps your children. Listen, then, to God’s voice speaking to you in this deep sorrow ; acknowledge to Him your sinfulness, and you will find Him ready, oh ! so ready, to forgive. Christ has died for you, borne the punishment you had deserved, and therefore God can forgive you, sinful though you may be, the moment you lift up your heart to Him, and in Christ’s precious name claim that forgiveness.”

Antonio’s head had for a long time been bowed between his hands, and now his whole form was shaking with sobs. Was it possible that his children had been taken from him in order to bring to his poor stricken heart a blessing he had never known ?

“ I am going to close now, friends,” the preacher said. “ What shall I tell my Master, when I go home, about the way in which you have received His message ? He has sent me to offer you the Bread of Life. Shall I tell Him you refuse to take it because your souls are not hungry ? I have set the Saviour forth before you. Will you refuse Him because you do not feel the burden of your sins ? God has been holding out to you the gift of eternal life. Are you going to turn away from it because you do not believe that you

are dead in sins ? Decide now, I beseech you in His name ; this may be your last opportunity.”

During the short, earnest prayer which followed Antonio remained in the same position ; the people around him rose and went out, but still he did not raise his head. Peppuccio was watching him anxiously, but did not venture to touch him or speak to him. Soon the preacher, who had been saying good-night to the rest of his audience, and exchanging a few words with a fellow-worker, came up and laid his hand on Antonio’s shoulder. The poor man started, and looked up into the compassionate face bending over him.

“ What is troubling you, my friend ? ”

“ My sins—my sins ! ” he groaned.

“ Have you been long in trouble about your sins ? ”

“ No, I never felt them till this evening,” answered Antonio, between his sobs.

“ And what has made you feel them now ? ” asked his new friend, taking a seat by his side.

“ What you said about the poor widow. Signore, I have been just like her. I have often gone to confession, but I never really felt or meant what I said. And now God has taken my children from me, just as He took the widow’s son. Yes, signore, my three little ones all died in less than a fortnight.”

Antonio quite broke down here, and could say no more.

The preacher also was too much moved to

speak at first ; he pressed the poor maruzzaro's hand as a sign of sympathy, and both sat in silence for a few moments.

“ Oh, signore ! I thought God had treated me very cruelly,” Antonio said, when he felt able to speak ; “ but now I begin to think differently. He has been very good to me, and I have done nothing but sin against Him.”

“ It is God's Holy Spirit who has brought you to see that, my friend,” said the preacher ; “ and now let us pray that the same Holy Spirit may show you what a precious Saviour is waiting to receive you.”

So they knelt down, Antonio and Peppuccio, together with the speaker and his fellow-worker, and the two servants of God poured forth fervent prayers for the salvation of the poor heart-broken sinner by their side. When the prayer was ended, the preacher read several passages from God's Word to Antonio, while his friend had a talk with Peppuccio, and was delighted to find that the little boy had already come to the Lord Jesus, and was quite sure that his sins were forgiven.

But it was growing very late, and though both Antonio and Peppuccio felt as if they could have stayed all night, they knew that Rosa would be getting anxious about them. Antonio was still full of grief ; it seemed as if nothing could bring him comfort or peace, but his Christian friends felt that they could leave him in God's hands,

and that the Holy Spirit who had convinced him of sin would bring peace to his troubled heart. Before leaving, Antonio gladly promised that he and his adopted child would come to a Sunday-school which was held in the little hall, and where they would be taught to read the Bible.

When they reached home they found, as they had expected, that poor Rosa had been very anxious about them, and her anxiety was by no means diminished when she heard where they had been.

“ Why, Antonio ! ” she exclaimed, “ that must be the very place Padre Anselmo was speaking to me about the other day. He said he had heard of some who had gone to it, and he had been warning them against it, for he says it is a heretic place, and that if we go there the devil will get hold of us, and never let us go again. Oh, marito mio ! what *have* you been doing ? ”

“ Well, Rosa mia, I have promised that I will go there to a school to learn to read, and I want you to go with me.”

“ Never ! I will never set my foot inside the heretic place, and I hope you will have more sense than to go again, or let Peppuccio go.” And Rosa said a great deal more which I have not time to tell you, and which is hardly worth repeating. But Antonio was firm ; he felt sure that what he had heard in that little hall was the truth, and go again he would. And go again he did.

But it was not the preacher at the hall whom God used to set Antonio's soul at rest—the preacher had been the means of showing him his sinfulness—it was little Peppuccio whose childlike words brought him into peace and joy.

Sunday after Sunday, and in spite of Rosa's opposition and the threats of the priest, Peppuccio and his father were found in their places at the "heretic" hall; and after a time they were able to read for themselves the precious book which contained the good news that had made such a difference to their lives.

Day after day they prayed for the dear mother, and at last the time came when she too might be seen going with her husband and child to hear the Word of God read and preached. It was long before Rosa openly confessed that she had been born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but, when she did, her life testified to the truth of her words.

And now we must say good-bye to our little friend Peppuccio. He still has much to learn, and he finds that if he does not constantly watch and pray, and constantly read his new treasure, the Bible, he is liable to sin against the Lord who loves him so much. But he knows where to look for help to overcome his great enemy, and he finds many opportunities for serving his dear Master among the children around him. Altogether he leads a happy, useful life, for even a little snail-

seller in the Lane of the Seventh Heaven is not shut out from happiness and usefulness, and he often thanks God for the terrible illness which sent him to the hospital where he learned to know his Lord and Saviour.

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