

THE UNDER DOG IN THE FIGHT.

BY DAVID BAKER.

I know that the world, that the great big world,
From the peasant up to the king,
Has a different tale from the tale I tell,
And a different song to sing.

But for me—and I care not a single fig
If they say I am wrong or right—
I shall always go for the weaker dog,
For the under dog in the fight.

I know that the world, that the great big world,
Will never a moment stop
To see which dog may be in the fault,
But will shout for the dog on top.

But for me, I never shall pause to ask
Which dog may be in the right,
For my heart will beat, while it beats at all,
For the under dog in the fight.

Perchance what I've said I had best not have said,
Or 'twere better I said it incoog,
But with heart and with glass filled choek 'to the
brim,
Here's health to the bottom dog.

The above poem is well known; but the following
sequel to it is new and worthy of comparison with the
original.

THE WISE OLD DOG.

You may say what you please of your bottom dog,
Or any dog that you please,
I go for the dog, the wise old dog,
That knowingly takes his ease.

And wagging his tail outside the ring—
Keeping always his bone in sight—
Cares not a pin in his sound old head,
For either dog in the fight.

I know there's dogs—injudicious dogs—
Who think it quite the thing
To take the part of one of the dogs,
And go yelping into the ring.

But I care not a pin what all may say
In regard to the wrong or right,
My money goes as well as my song,
For the dog who keeps out of the fight.

TOMMATOO.

I.

THE HOUSE BY THE STONE-YARD.

A fairy that had lost the power of vanishing,
and was obliged to remain ever present, doing
continual good; a cricket on the hearth, chirp-
ing through heat and cold; an animated amu-
let, sovereign against misfortune; a Santa
Claus, without the wrinkles, but young and
beautiful, choosing the darkest moments to leap
right into one's heart, and drop there the
prettiest moral playthings to gladden and make
gay,—such, in my humble opinion, was Tom-
mattoo.

As yet I do not ask the reader to agree with
me; for over him I have one great advantage,—
I know who Tommattoo is. When, however, he
makes her acquaintance also, hears her twitter
round the house, beholds the flash of her large
dusky-gray eyes, is wonder-struck at the mar-
vellous twinkling of her ever-dancing little
feet, he can take his choice of all the personi-
fications with which I began this story, and I
feel convinced that he will select the most beau-
tiful to enrobe Tommattoo.

This is (or rather was, six years ago, when
the incidents to be narrated took place,—but I
shall narrate them in the present tense) a vast
flat of land stretching along the New York shore
of the North River, close to where Thirty-
second street vanishes into a swamp, in which
unborn avenues are supposed to be slowly ma-
turing. Although yet in embryo, they are al-
ready christened, and city engineers have im-
aginative ground-plans hanging on their walls,
where Twelfth and Thirteenth Avenues are
boldly represented, with as much minuteness as
Fifth and Sixth. Should, however, any san-
guine person be led by those delusive maps to
seek for such mythical thoroughfares, Ponce de
Leon, after his pursuit of the Fountain of
Youth, would not offer a more striking example
of ill-success. On reaching the spot where im-
agination depicted the long perspective of rails,
with crowded and hurrying cars gliding smoothly
to and fro, he would behold this vision of civic
activity replaced by the dreary and mysterious
waste I have spoken of, without even a sign-
post pointing to the splendid future reserved for
it by city surveyors.

This tract of land is perhaps the most melan-
choly and mysterious spot in the whole city.
The different streets that cross the island pull
up, as it were, suddenly on reaching this dreary
place, seemingly afraid to trust themselves any
further. The buildings that approach nearest
to its confines are long, low ranges of fetid
slaughter-houses, where on Sundays bloated
butcher-boys lounge against the walls; and on
week-days one hears through the closed doors
the muffled blow, the heavy fall of the oxen
within; the groan, and the hard-drawn breath;
and then a red, sluggish stream trickles out
from under the doorway and flows into the
gutter, where hungry dogs wait patiently to lap
it up. This murderous atmosphere, these smells
of blood, seem appropriate enough as one ap-
proaches this desolate locality.

A great plain of red, swampy clay is covered
here and there with numberless huge, helpless
beams of timber,—some floating like dead rafts
in the stream, and chained to the bank; others
high and dry, blackening in the sun, and
shadowing criminal-looking dogs that skulk in
and out among them all day long. One or two
immature piers jut out into the river here and
there, and grimy sloops that seem to have no

particular trade, unless it is to rot calmly at
their moorings, lie alongside, and grate and
chafe lazily against the slimy logs. A few
homeless boys, with smeared faces and thin,
starved arms, who seem to have dressed them-
selves in the rags and kite-tails that flutter on
telegraph-wires, lie on the sunny sides of the
timber piles sleeping away hunger, or some-
times sit on the edges of the green piers languid-
ly fishing for something which they never
catch. Cinders most unaccountably prevail all
over the place; they crackle under the feet,
and the dogs gather round occasional piles of
them, growling over a burned bone lying in the
ashes; where they come from is not yet to be
known. There are no houses, no factories, and
the rotting sloops are so damp and slimy that it
would be a mockery to suppose a fire had ever
been lit in any one of them. Nevertheless the
cinders prevail; and at certain hours in the
day two or three crouching creatures wander
slowly among the heaps, picking mysterious ob-
jects, with hands that seem themselves to have
been burned into cokes.

The place is also a species of morgue for dead
dogs. Every cur that Hudson drowns floats in-
evitably to this spot and is swept up on the
swampy bank,—when the outlawed mongrels
that skulk between the timber logs crowd
around it, and perhaps identify the corpse. On
Sundays you see a few low-browed, soap-locked
loafers strolling among the piles, pitching stones
into the water, and, if it is summer, stripping
off their tattered shirts to have a swim; but on
week-days the place is entirely dead. The
starved boys and the shadowy rag-pickers
flitting here and there give no air of life; they
seem very thin and impalpable, and haunt the
place like ghosts.

Further on this dreary swamp changes some-
what its character. The great balks of timber
disappear, and a few shingle huts—so loosely
built that the wind whistles through their walls
with a shriek of triumph—are scattered here
and there. Large masses of stone lie about,
hewn into square blocks for house-fronts, and
in the daytime the monotonous click of the
stone-cutter's chisel shrills continually from
the shingle huts. This straggling stone-yard,
for such it is, is perhaps less desolate than the
swamp further down, but at night—when the
moon streams on the huge white blocks that lie
there so cold and dead, and the huts are deserted
by the workmen, and nothing moves but a
shadowy dog that flits by, seen for an instant
against the pallid stones—the place is in-
expressibly weird and lonely.

Just on the confines of this stone-yard, in a
ratty, half-made road that is bounded on both
sides by burned-looking building-lots, where
nothing hides the scalded earth but some un-
healthy boulders, and occasional remnants of
old shoes that are black and pulpy with decay,
stands a small house built of unpainted shing-
les. It is two-storied, with a basement, and a
somewhat imposing flight of steps up to the
door; yet it wears a reckless and despairing
aspect. I have no doubt when this house was
built it had many youthful hopes of establishing
a neighbourhood and becoming a dwelling of
respectability. It promised itself, perhaps, a
coat or two of paint, and had visions of being
the ancestor of a street. But year after year
wore away, and it found itself still naked as
when it was born. No companion dwelling
lifted its head to cheer the solitude. On all
sides the bleak river-winds touched and smote
its bare walls until its windows chattered with
the cold. It grew weary of waiting for the
neighbourhood that never was to come, and
seemed to care no longer what became of it. It
let bearded mosses grow all over its haggard face.
Its edges were chipped and ragged; its chim-
neys, no longer spruce and tapering, bulged and
tottered to one side, like the crushed hat of a
confirmed drunkard. It buttoned itself up no
more about the chest with its snug, comfortable
doors, but let them hang loose on one hinge,
and flap about in the wind. It was evident to
any one who saw it that the house near the
stone-yard had gone to the bad.

Forlorn and seedy as it looked, this house
was inhabited. The shivering, shrunken win-
dows gleamed with lights by night, yet not
cheerfully, but with a wild glare, like that
which streams from the eyes of those about to
die. If the skulking men that prowled in
summer evenings among the sheds of the stone-
yard, whistling mysteriously to each other, had
any taste for music, the house would have been
to them a source of great wonder. Sometimes
for hours together a wild and mellow music
would stream upon the air, soaring over the
dreary yard, wailing sadly along the waste
river-grounds and by the rotting sloops until it
reached the water, when it would float trium-
phantly along, as if it knew that it was leaving
the desolate place behind it, and bury itself deep
in the sleeping groves that nodded on the dis-
tant Weehawken heights. The character of
these melodious sounds was entirely mystical
and strange. They were not born of violin or
bugle, and yet seemed to have the souls of both
instruments intermingling with another dis-
tinctly their own;—another soul, not merely
instrumental, but human, passionate, luxuri-
ant, as if all the utterances of a great Italian
love—desire, entreaty, and triumph—were
translated into aerial harmonies.

To you and me, reader, there need be no mys-
tery in either house or music. That despairing-
looking chateau was inhabited; but by three
people,—an old man, a young girl, and a youth
of about twenty-one. As age is entitled to its
traditional homage of precedence, I will first

introduce to you the elder of the trio. I beg to
present to your notice the maestro, Baioccho.

You could not possibly conceive a man made
up with less waste of material than Signor
Baioccho. Nature, when she formed him, must
have been terribly short of stuff. There was
too little of everything in his physical composi-
tion. He was abbreviated in every limb and
feature. This, nevertheless, was fortunate, for
had he been on a large scale he would have been
insupportably ugly; he was too small, how-
ever, to be repulsive, and so was only queer.
But how queer he was, with his withered,
pinched-up face, his sparse, stiff beard, which
looked like a thin growth of thorns, and his
quaint, convulsed figure, that gave one the idea
that all inside of him was catgut and wheels,
and that something was continually breaking
in his machinery! Yet, with all this likeness
to a comic toy, how inexpressibly mournful was
the countenance of Signor Baioccho! what ter-
rible sorrow was hopelessly shut up in that
wretched little frame!

Baioccho had been a musician, and was now
a cook. Years ago, when opera was young in
New York, Baioccho came here from Italy with
a company, set up an opera house, was instantly
successful, and made a fortune. Music was his
religion, the lyric stage his temple, the con-
ductor's desk his altar, the overture his mass.
But he became a fanatic to his faith. He en-
larged his house; he spent thousands of dollars
on the production of new operas, and, as a
matter of course, he became bankrupt. For the
opera is like a Parisian mistress, the most
charming, fascinating, bewildering of all crea-
tions, who invariably leaves you without a
shilling at last. For many years poor Baioccho
struggled to keep his feet. He led orchestras
at second-rate theatres; he gave lessons on the
piano and violin, always hoping, always dream-
ing of one day grasping again the magical
baton, the sceptre of his world. It was a vain
struggle, however; other maestri came over
from Italy with still more wondrous and expen-
sive singers than those Baioccho brought, and
they built opera-houses, and bought newspaper
puffs, and covered the dead walls with huge an-
nouncements of colossal successes; and the
world, rushing on the heels of novelty, swept
over the ancestor of American opera, and poor
Baioccho found himself trampled on, bruised,
and left to die.

It were too sad a task to enumerate the
various steps which led Baioccho from Par-
nassus to the kitchen. An accomplishment of
which in his palmy days he had been not a little
proud, was now brought into requisition to save
him from starvation; the hand that was too
weak to hold the baton found itself still able to
brandish the ladle. Those gay Italian tenors,
those majestic basses, little thought when, round
his elegant supper-table long ago, they used to
to applaud his amateur cookery, delicious
mayonnaises, harmonious salads, that the day
would arrive when the poor conductor would
don the white apron and cotton cap very
seriously, and sweat all day in a restaurant kit-
chen through an eternal round of soups and
roasts and entrées ever the same. But so it
was. Those who frequented Calcar's Restaurant
would now and then behold a wizened little man
stealing quietly from some mysterious passage
leading to the kitchen, and sneaking up to the
bar, where he would hastily swallow a potent
draught of raw brandy, and shuffle back guiltily
to the place whence he came. And they would
see one or two old New Yorkers looking pitifully
after him, and saying to each other that they
remembered poor Baioccho when he drove his
carriage. He now trudged home every night on
foot; and it was sad to see the old fellow, un-
steady with drink, staggering down the ratty
road to the house near the stone-yard, where
the faithful Tommattoo kept watch until she
heard his stumbling footsteps, when, tripping to
the door, she tenderly helped him up to bed.

So! we have come at last to Tommattoo. I
have been longing to get to her for some time
past, but it would have been unkind to have
deserted old Baioccho now that he is so poor.
Salutation to his misfortunes!

Tommattoo was Baioccho's only child. In
some quaint old Italian chapel, it may be by
the shores of Sorrento, a smiling babe was one
sunny day christened by the stout old Padre,
and the name bestowed was Tomasina. Melo-
dious as was this pretty name, the little girl
that bore it, as soon as she reached lisping age,
obstinately refused to be known by any cognom-
en but that of Tommattoo. This sounded
awfully heathenish to old Baioccho, but she was
apparently determined, and in time her imper-
ious infant will had its effect on the family. She
became Tommattoo to all intents and purposes,
as far as household experience went, and even
when she grew up to the age of reason did not
seem anxious to reclaim her original appella-
tion.

Tommattoo was one of those lovely, fair-haired
Italians that one sees so seldom, but who once
seen are never forgotten. At some antique
period, when Alaric was king, some of the blood
of his blonde race must have mingled with the
olive-skinned Roman Baiocchi, and after cen-
turies of rest suddenly bloomed in Tommattoo.
Her eyes were a dark liquid gray, like a twilight
lake. Her face was pale, yet not cold, for a
southern fire seemed to smoulder beneath the
skin, with a beautiful, subdued glow. Her
mouth, small and moist and rosy, pouted over
pearly teeth, half seen, and the curves of her
smooth cheeks swept into a wickedly dimpled
chin, that aided and abetted with all its might
the criminal beauty of her bewildering lips.

This sweet virginal face was set in a golden
frame of luxuriant hair, that one of Raphael's
saints might have envied.

Yet why speak of Tommattoo's beauty so rap-
tulously? I shall have no enthusiasm left for
that bright and joyous nature that burst from
her as the sun bursts from a golden cloud, shed-
ding its own lustre on everything, and infusing
into all a portion of its own innate worth.
Every one has felt at times, when wandering
through the fields, the intense joy experienced
from the twittering of the birds amidst the
branches and the glancing of their tiny forms
through the leaves. Some such pure and
healthy influence did Tommattoo exercise over
the little household. She twittered and sung,
and, as it were, fluttered lightly through the
rooms, until one could swear that the sun shone
wherever she went. All day, while old Baioccho
was absent attending to his culinary duties,
compounding wondrous soups, and moving
amidst the thick steams of the kitchen like an
elf in some incantation scene, Tommattoo was
putting the old house in order; sweeping up the
little sitting-room, displaying its scanty furni-
ture to the best advantage, and occasionally
darting like a swallow into Mr. Gustave Beau-
mont's sanctum sanctum.

It must be confessed that this was one of the
household occupations that Tommattoo perform-
ed with the greatest willingness; for Mr. Gus-
tave Beaumont was young, handsome, and
played the most delightful melodies on his
great instrument, invented by himself, entitled
the Pancorno. The Pancorno was a singular
piece of mechanism; hideously suggestive, in
appearance, of some nameless instrument of tor-
ture from the dungeons of the Inquisition, yet
in reality capable of soothing the most agon-
izing pains by the sweetness of its notes. By
aid of some interior arrangement of tubes, the
vibrations of the horn portion acted in turn
upon what must have been a series of wires also
concealed, and which seemed to give the effect
of a trio between flute, violin, and French-horn.
It was from the Pancorno that the seraphic
strains heard at night across the stone-yard
floated so harmoniously, giving to the old house
an air of being one of those enchanted abodes
frequent in fairy tales, in which dwelt some
spell-bound prince, who thus summoned in
music his faithful knights to his rescue.

Gustave was a clever young Frenchman, with
an extraordinary passion for music, whom old
Baioccho had known ever since he was a child.
He was the son of the bassoon in one of the or-
chestras which the maestro had conducted in
his palmy days; but one night the bassoon died
in the middle of a rapid passage, and the little
Gustave was left without a father, and but one
friend, Baioccho. The old Italian took the
bassoon's son home, brought him up as his own
child along with Tommattoo; and when his fall
came Gustave still shared his scanty means. To
do the young fellow justice, he wanted to work,
but the old man would not have it. "You are
a genius, Gustave," he would say, "and, please
the Virgin, you shall do something great." So,
Gustave did nothing great or small save the in-
vention of the Pancorno, out of which he ex-
pected to reap a fortune, and he continued to
live at the house by the stone-yard, having first
scrupulously bargained with his entertainer to
pay three dollars a week, which, as he did no-
thing but play on the Pancorno and make love
to Tommattoo, it is needless to say he never
earned and never paid. It quieted his con-
science however, and he used to say to himself
that when he sold his invention for one hundred
thousand dollars, that being the least he would
take for it, old Baioccho should live like a
prince.

And this is the last of the inmates of the
house by the stone-yard.

II.

A FAMILY GROUP.

"Is that you, father?"

"Ah, the little Tommattoo! So you main-
tain the watch for the poor old father! Bless
you, little angel!"

"Take care of the step, father. Take care."

"Put yourself easy, my child. I will be re-
mindful of the step. I am very steadfast on my
feet this evening."

And, as if to falsify his testimony, poor
Baioccho staggered up the steps leading to the
hall-door, and would have fallen if Tommattoo
had not caught one of his arms and held him
up.

"It is nothing; it is nothing!" he exclaimed,
as he tottered through the hall into the little
parlour. "I can walk myself well enough.
But it is the kitchen,—that dam kitchen! It
has got into my head, my child. Where is the
cognac?"

"Do you think it would do you any good,
father?" asked Tommattoo, sorrowfully; "won't
it make your head bad?"

"Ah, little dove! It does not comprehend.
My child, the cognac is the life to me. When
I stew and form dishes and mingle soups all day
long in that dam kitchen, it gets into my head;
and sometimes, *mon Dieu!* when I stand over
the *ragout*, and try to forget the place where I
have found myself for a moment, the old times
return upon me and I become very sad and sor-
rowful, to that I have to walk myself out to the
bar and drink the cognac; and then, *per
baccho!* I remember myself not, and I go back
to my kitchen quite raised. Give me one little
glass of cognac, my child!—one glass for poor
old father!"