

THE BUTTER LION.

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Amidst the mountains which are at no great distance from Venice is a village not much known to travellers, because it lies out of the direct line of railways, but which is worthy of a visit, both from its picturesque situation amongst hill and dale, chestnut trees and vineyards, and because it was the birthplace of an artist of world-wide renown.

Crowning the village on a high eminence stands a castle now falling into ruins, but which, in the middle of the last century, was the summer residence of the noble and wealthy Italian family of Faliero, their winter abode being a princely palace on the Grand Canal of Venice.

The Count de Faliero, who at that time was the owner of the Castle, was a man much beloved by the peasants of Possagno. Amongst the inhabitants was an elderly man named Pasino Canova, the stonemason of Possagno. He was very proud of his position as such, for it was looked on as hereditary, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather having held it before him. He had had one great disappointment in life. His good wife Marina had given him a daughter, but no son to succeed him in his post as village stonemason.

The trial was, however, softened to him when his daughter Louise married a distant cousin who bore the same name as himself, and though her husband died a year after their marriage, he left his young wife with a little son, who soon grew to be the pet and darling of his grandparents, and in whom was centred their hopes that the post of mason would not pass away from their family. His mother lived with her parents after her husband's death. When her boy was about seven years old, her hand was again sought in marriage by a man who was going to settle in Germany, which in those days was considered to be quite a far-away country. Now arose the question, What was to be done with the young Antonio?

"Leave the child with us, Louise," said her father. "I shall teach him my trade, and he will be an honor to it, for already the little one watches every stroke I make, and longs to be at work himself."

There was some further discussion, and the result was that it was decided the boy should remain with his grandparents. For the next few years Antonio's days were passed between the cure's house, his grandfather's workshop, and a certain beloved spot beside a bed of clay in a wood not far from his home. Here were two large, flat-headed stones. One served him for a seat, the other for a table on which to work the clay into every variety of shape and form that his fancy suggested. He was about eleven years old, when the village was thrown into excitement by hearing that the Count de Faliero was going to give a grand banquet to a number of nobles on the day on which his son would come of age.

For some days all was bustle, but at length the anxious steward had the satisfaction of seeing that everything was completed. The long banquet table was set out in the great hall, decorated with plate and flowers. One ornament only remained to be placed in the centre, and this was a beautifully executed marble lion in a recumbent attitude, the crest of the Faliero family. It always graced the board on festive occasions. But alas! as a young footman lifted it from its place on the sideboard, and was crossing the hall to put it into the hands of the steward, who stood waiting to receive it, the servant's foot slipped on the polished marble floor, and the ornament was broken into several pieces! The steward was very angry, and the youth terrified. What was to be done?

In this dilemma the steward thought of Pasino, the stone-cutter. He knew him to be an ingenious man, and hoped he might be able to extemporize something to put on the pedestal. Accordingly he was sent for, and soon obeyed the summons, Antonio accompanying him, for the boy was curious to get a sight of what was going on in the Castle. Pasino was at once taken into the banquet hall and told of the disaster. He shook his head and declared it was out of his power to do what was required of him.

"Let me try, grandfather," said Antonio; "I could make a lion like the broken one; I have often done one in clay."

"Out upon you, boy, for your nonsense," replied Pasino; "do you think one of your dirty wet clay figures would be so easily to put here?"

"No, but I could make a yellow lion that I am sure would do if they would give me a great lump of butter," persisted the lad.

His grandfather was leaving without reply to what he regarded as a childish speech, but the steward, who had chanced to have seen one or two of Antonio's figures, asked him what he meant about the butter.

"Give me some hard butter, and you shall see," replied the boy.

"Come along with me, then," said the steward; and taking him by the arm, he led him to the dairy, where a buxom-looking woman was busy amongst her pots and pans of cream. A keg of butter was given to him, the steward saying, "Now, my lad, set to work and see what you can do. This butter seems tolerably fit for your purpose, I think;" and he placed a large quantity on a slab of marble before Antonio, who had already taken out of his pocket one or two wooden instruments he had made for himself, and was in the habit of using constantly when modelling his figures of clay.

"I only want a large knife," replied the boy. Then, turning up his sleeves, he set to work, the dairywoman watching him with disgust, as he cut into her cherished butter without mercy. But by degrees her anger began to turn into admiration, as she saw what the young workman was effecting. For under his practised hands there was coming forth from the shapeless mass of butter the figure of a noble recumbent lion. Head, neck, body, mane, tail, paws—all appeared as if from a magician's wand. So quickly and cleverly was it done, that in half an hour the well-known crest of the Falieros stood on the marble pedestal, as true and correct in its proportions as the one that had been broken. The steward was delighted, and pronounced it to be quite worthy to go on the table.

Amongst the Count's visitors was a well-known sculptor, of the name of Torretto. His place was near the centre of the table, and his eye was constantly directed to the lion. His remarks upon it drew general attention to its execution, and on being questioned by his master, the steward informed the Count of the accident to the marble one, and of Antonio's successful attempt to replace it in so novel a material as butter.

"I would like to see the lad," said the sculptor. "He has produced a marvellously clever figure."

The next day as Antonio was sitting beside his beloved clay bed, busily fashioning a lion from memory similar to the butter one, he was surprised at the appearance of the count and his visitor, Signor Torretto. At the moment of the gentleman's appearance he was holding out the lion at arm's length, to survey it before putting in some last touches. He was a shy boy, and blushed deeply when praised for his performance of the previous day, for he was quite unused to seeing strangers, but the Count's kind manner soon reassured him.

"What put it into your head to use the butter, my lad?" he asked.

"I have sometimes got grandmother to let me shape a bit of hers, so I knew I could make a lion if it were hard enough."

"And how long have you been in the habit of making clay figures?" asked the Count.

"Always," was the laconic reply.

Meanwhile Signor Torretto had been carefully examining the clay lion.

"Tell me, my boy," he said, "has no one ever taught you to model these things? Have you always done them quite by yourself?"

"Quite by myself," said Antonio, rather wondering at the question.

"Will you show me some more of your work? What do you do with what you make?"

Antonio replied that he generally destroyed them as fast as he made them, but he had a few in the workshop. Thither they repaired, and Torretto examined what he found on the shelf with great interest. There was a dog, a rabbit, a pigeon, a cat, and one or two other specimens of the boy's skill, each one of which convinced

the sculptor that he possessed genius of a high order.

"How should you like to become a real sculptor, my lad?" he asked, "and make animals and figures in marble?"

Antonio colored with excitement, and forgetting his shyness, exclaimed—"Oh, I should love it better than anything in the world!"

"I should like to speak to your grandfather," said Torretto. But when he spoke to Pasino, the old man shook his head and at once declined to listen to Torretto's proposal of taking Antonio as his pupil.

"Well," said the sculptor, "we will say no more at present, but if you think better of my offer, and will let me know through Count Faliero that you do so, I shall be willing to take the boy at any time. He shall live in my house; and I will provide for him till he has learnt his art, and can take care of himself. I live in Venice, and the distance from here is not so great but that he could visit you from time to time."

So saying, Signor Torretto and the Count departed; but (the stonemason remarked to his wife) "not before he had done more mischief to their grandson than would be easily undone."

In one sense this was true. Antonio from that day never liked any allusion made to his being a stonemason. His boyish ambition had been fired. He felt secretly that he was capable of a far higher lot.

Pasino was too sharp-sighted not to see that a change had come over his grandson.

"He is not the same lad he formerly was," he said one evening to his wife. "He never laughs or sings about the place as he used to."

"And he no longer seems to care about making his clay figures," said the wife. "He either isn't well, or he's unhappy. I tell you what, husband, it's no good trying to keep back nature, and it's my belief that nature means Antonio to be a great man some day. Maybe we've no right to refuse the gentleman's offer."

Pasino did not reply, but he pondered much as he worked away next day. At length he resolved to speak to the boy on the subject.

"Tell me, Antonio," said he, "should you like to go and live in Venice and learn to be a sculptor?"

"Oh, grandfather, yes! yes!" exclaimed he; and he started from his seat and went beside the old man; "I should like to make marble figures and beautiful things, and sell them, and give you and grandmother the money."

"If ever the day comes that you make marble figures and sell them, boy, it will not be till after your grandmother and I are lying in the graveyard; but we won't stand in your way if you are so desirous of going to the gentleman, though it makes my heart sore to think that the office I hold should go out of the family."

His grandfather's remark went more to Antonio's heart—"We won't keep thee here, lad, though it will be lonely without thee, and we thought to have had thee to be the comfort of our old age; but God bless thee wherever thou art."

"I will not leave you," said Antonio; "I will stay with you always, and I will be a stonemason."

"Nay, my boy, that musn't be if God points out another way for you," said Pasino; "old folks musn't think only of themselves; we will tell the Count that we mean to let you go if the other gentleman holds to his offer."

He was as good as his word; though it was a sore struggle to him to go to the Castle, where the Count was now residing for several months, and tell of his resolve to give up the boy. The Count promised to communicate with Signor Torretto, and in a short time received a letter to say that he was ready to take Antonio any day. A servant from the Castle was going to Venice in the course of a fortnight, and the Count proposed that the boy should go under his charge to the beautiful city, which at that time was in her glory.

Antonio was kindly received by Signor Torretto, who became more and more interested in him, and convinced that he would one day amply repay him for the instruction he gave him.

"And how does Antonio get on?" asked Count Faliero of the sculptor, about three years from the date of his going to him.

"Most wonderfully," was the reply,

"and only as a genius can get on. I have such an opinion of himself and of his talent that I have offered to adopt him on condition that he changes his name to my own, but this he will not do; he says he wishes to retain his grandfather's. He is much attached to the old couple, and fears, I think, to hurt their feelings by accepting my offer, and I must say I respect him for it; perhaps he may consent some day when they are gone."

But it was so ordered that the master was to go first. Signor Torretto died when Antonio was about fifteen years old, and the youth would have been left without a patron, had not Count Faliero taken him in charge and given him a room in his palace. He also introduced him to the Academy of Fine Arts, where the best free instruction was given to those promising youths who desired to avail themselves of the privilege.

Antonio strained every nerve to improve. A great proof of his real talent was his extreme diffidence and modesty about his own merits.

He remained several years in the house of his patron, who continued his firm friend till his death, which happened when he was entering upon manhood, and beginning to make the name for himself which was afterwards known throughout the world by all lovers of art as that of "ANTONIO CANOVA."—*Band of Hope Review.*

FORKS.

Old Dr. P.—, a shrewd Baptist minister of the old school, was wont to declare that the decline of modern society into extravagance and corruption was largely a matter of forks.

"There were the Harveys," he said. "Grandfather Harvey bought a dozen two-tined steel forks when he set up housekeeping. The family lived in a little farm-house—bare floor, pine chairs, the wife doing her own work—all in accord with the forks. They'd no time for any reading but the Bible, or any recreation but church-going. Truth-telling, kind, God-fearing folks, were those Harveys."

"Their son John's wife brought a set of plated forks in her portion. Then things were freshened up to suit. Shan Brussels carpets, chromos on the wall, bonnets with feathers, and silk gowns on the women folks. No more dropping in at Grandfather Harvey's as you went by for a meal, sure of pot-luck and a hearty welcome. John's wife gave set dinners with a long notice and short bill of fare."

"John's son has the old place now. The forks are solid silver, the dinners have a dozen courses, the women dress after pictures, go to Europe in summer and the city in winter. But the farm is no bigger than before. The family live on credit. They have no time for their Bible and church, what with trying to keep up with the fashions and news and magazines and society. Forks are at the bottom of it all. Bring us back to the two-tined steel forks and all will be well."

There is no special malignant influence in forks. But the gradual introduction of needless luxuries into families of small incomes is undoubtedly the cause of most of the straining, the vulgar love of display, the financial ruin, and the false views of life which make American society so corrupt and uncertain. It is pleasanter to use silver than steel forks, but if silver forks mean debt, anxiety, and in the end the setting up of fashion instead of God on the family altar, to use steel is better breeding and better sense.

Our readers should remember, too, that luxury is a path in which no man takes a step backward. Nobody ever goes back, voluntarily, from silver to plated forks, or from plated to steel. It is easy to continue living simply; but to go back from a decorated to a simple life is, of all reforms, the most difficult.—*Youth's Companion.*

HERE is a verse for a very little child to speak at the missionary meeting:

There are many little children
Away across the sea,
Who do not know that Jesus died
For you and for me.
What shall I do to help them?
I'll tell you in a minute:
When you pass the box around,
I'll put some pennies in it.