

# A LEMON TREE.

WRITTEN FOR THE DISPATCH BY "UIDA."

It was a small lemon tree, not more than 40 inches high, growing in the red earthen vase, as all lemons are obliged to be grown north than Rome. There were many thousands and tens of thousands of other such trees in the land; but this one, although so little, was a source of joy and pride to its owner. He had grown it himself from a slender slip cast away on a heap of rubbish, and he had saved his pence up with effort and self-denial to purchase second-hand the big pot of ruddy clay in which it grew, now that it had reached its first fruit-bearing prime.

It had borne as its first crop seven big, fragrant lemons, hanging from its boughs, amid leaves which were as fresh and green as a meadow in May. He had watched its first buds creep out of the slender twigs and swell and gradually into sharp-pointed little cones which in their turn became pale yellow fruit "fit for a princess," as he said, putting their primrose colored rind. They seemed so many separate miracles to him, coming as by some magic out of the little starry white flowers on the glossy twigs.

He was a poor, ignorant man, by name of Dario Balassino, known as the Fringuello (or Chaffinch) to his neighborhood and fellow workmen. He lived on the south side of the ferry of Bovezzano, and dug and carried the river sand; a rude laborer and a thankless, taking the sinew and spirit out of a man and putting little in return into his pocket. The nave of the ferry is a place to please an artist. All the land around, on this south side is orchard, great pear trees and cherry trees linked together by low growing vines, and in the spring months making a sea of blossoms stretching to the river's edge. The watermill, which were centuries ago, stand yellow and old, and clustered like beavers' dams upon the water. The noise of the weir is loud, but the song of the nightingale can be heard above it.

Looking along westward down the widening, curving stream above the fruit trees planted thick as woods, there arise two towers of the domes and spires of the city of Florence, backed by their hills, which here take an Alpine look upon them, when the sun sets beyond the rounded summits of the more distant Carrara range, and the spurs of the Apennines grow deeply blue with that transparent color which is never seen in northern lands. To the north also lie the mountains, and on the east; and late into May the snow lingers where the day breaks above Vallombrosa and Casentino.

All the vale is orchard, broken now and then by some great stone pine, some walnut or chestnut tree, some church spire with its statue of its saint, some low red-brown roofs, some gray old granary with open

timbered lofts. It is a serene and sylvan scene—of sunset and stars grand—the distant city rises on its throne of verdure, seeming transfused as Dante called it may have seen it in his dreams. Of all this beauty outspread before his sight Fringuello saw little; his eyes were always set on the sand and shingle into which he drove his heart-shaped spade. All which is the peasant of the painter, the paradise of the poet, is nothing to the toiler of the soil. The sweat of his fatigue drops down before his eyes, and shuts out from him the scenes amid which he dwells. For him the weir has no song, the orchard no poem, the mountains no counsel, and the vale no charm. He does but see the cart rucks in the sand, the housedly in the sunlight, the coin hard earned in his horny palm, the straw which covers the coveted vine flask, or the glass which holds the hot and scalding flavors of less natural drinks.

Now and then Giatto looks up from his sheepfold, and Robert Burns from his furrow, but it is only once in a century. This poor laborer, Fringuello, had no room in a poor house which looked on the weir and the watermill. He had never been able to have a house of his own, and even the small charge of the rooms was more than he could manage, though he thought they were. His employment was intermittent, and in winter, when the river was spread wide over its bed, covering the sand and shingle, it ceased entirely. Some odd jobs he got elsewhere, but nothing certain. He had no knowledge of any other work than the digging and carrying which had been his lot. But he was always merry with the mirth which had gained him his nickname, and in his light-hearted poverty had done what the poorest always do, he had married at 20 a girl as poor as himself. She was called Lizina, the familiar corruption of Luisa, and was the daughter of a cobbler of the adjacent village of Bispoli. It was an imprudent union and a foolish one, but it was happier than many which fulfill every condition of prudence and thrift. Lizina was a bit of buoyant, active and laborious creature, and whilst she lived he never had a hole in his hempen shirt, or went without a table-spoonful of oil to his beans and bread. They were as merry and happy as if they had really been a pair of chaffinches in a nest in one of the pear trees. But of joy the roots are envious, whether it go to roots in garret or palace, and in a few short years Lizina died of fever and left him all alone with one little girl, as like herself as the bud is like the flower.

For months he never sang as he worked, and his ruddy face was pale, and he had long fits of weeping when he lay on his lonely bed and stared up at the starry skies, which were visible through the square unshuttered window. Lizina was in the ground, in a nameless grave, with two crossed sticks set above it; and the river rolled over the weir,

and the wide wheel turned, and the orchards blossomed, and the people laughed on the yellow sand, and no one cared that a little merry, glad, tender, harmless life was done for and overstepped down into the clay like a crushed butterfly, a broken branch, a rotten fruit, or a dead grasshopper. Nobody cared; and after a time he, too, ceased to care, and began to hum and whistle and carol once more as he worked, and laughed once more at his comrades' jokes as they dug up the heavy sand. In the lives of the poor there is little leisure for sorrow, and toil passes over them like an iron roller over the inequalities of a road, forcing them down into a dull indifference, as the roller forces into level nothingness alike the jagged flint and the sprouting grass.

Meanwhile, Lizina, as she was called after her mother, grew up upon like the little lemon tree which had been planted at her birth, a lovely child like a Correggio cherub, thriving on her dry bread and herb soup as the lemon plant thrives on the dry earth and ungenial atmosphere of the attic under the roof.

The Fringuello did his best by both of them, making up to them by tenderness and gentleness what he was forced to renege to both of maternal comfort. Both were child, and the tree went hungry often, suffered from cold and frost in the sharp, short winters, and languished in the scorching days when foul odors rose from the market of maternal comfort. Both were child, and the tree went hungry often, suffered from cold and frost in the sharp, short winters, and languished in the scorching days when foul odors rose from the market of maternal comfort.

All that he could not help; he could not help it more than he could help the shrinking of the river in drought and the coming of blight to the orchards. Though it went to his soul like a knife-thrust when he saw the child pale and thin, and the lemon tree, sickly and shrunken, he could do nothing. But he murmured always, "Patience, courage," as he coaxed the child to eat a morsel of crust and consoled the tree with the spray of spring water, and he got them both safely through several burning summers and icy winters, and when they were both 18 years old the tree was strong and buxom, with glossy foliage and fine fruit, and the child was healthy and handsome, with shining eyes and laughing mouth.

He had worked as hard as any mule for them both, and though a young man in years, he looked an old man from excess of toil, though his heart was light and his smile was like sunshine.

When he got up in the dark to go to his work and drew his leathern belt about his lean ribs he always looked at the pale light of dawn as it touched the green leaves of the tree and the closed eyes of the child, and then he muttered an ave, content and thankful at heart. Many would have thought the hardness of his lot, and the child enough for suicide; he never knew what it was to eat his fill, he never knew what it was to feel tired, he never knew what it was to have a son in his pocket for pleasure. His bones ached, and the gnawing of rheumatism was in his nerves from the many hours spent knee deep in water or damp sand, and always at the pit of his stomach was that other still worse gnawing

of perpetual insufficiency of food. But he was content and grateful to his fate, as the birds are, though they hunger and thirst, and every man's hand is against them.

The child and the tree were indissolubly united in his mind and memory. They had grown up together, and seemed part and parcel of each other. Imagination scarcely exists in the brains of the poor; they do not know what it is. The perpetual grind of daily work leaves no space for possibility of impersonal fancy in it; but in a vague kind of superstitious way, he associated the well-being of the one with the welfare of the other. If the tree sickened and drooped for a day, he always looked nervously at Lizina to see if she ailed anything also. If the little girl coughed or grew hot with fever, he always watched anxiously the leaves of the lemon. It was a tall man and reticent to him; and when he came up from the river at evening when his work was done, he looked upward always to the green boughs of the tree at the square little window of his garret under the deep eaves, and above an arched way of old brown brick.

If it had been missing at the window he would have told himself that Lizina was dead. There was no likelihood that it would ever be missed here. He had lived long, and this one would, he knew, most likely outlive himself if he kept it from the worm and fly, and rot and mildew. Nevertheless, he always glanced upward to make sure that it was there, and he took the strip of road which led to his home when his work in the sand was done. Lizina herself did not wait at the window. She always came jumping and dancing down the path, her amber curls flying, and her big, brown eyes sparkling; bare-footed, ill-clad, sootily fed, but happy and healthy, singing at the top of her voice as her father had always done in his youth.

When they reached their fifteenth birthday neither she nor the lemon tree had ever ailed anything worse than a passing chill from a frosty week, or a transient sickness from a sultry drought.

The lemon tree had given her the few little gifts she had ever received. The pence brought in by its fruit were always laid out for her; cake at Christmas, a sugar egg at Easter, a white ribbon for her first communion, a pair of shoes to wear on holy feasts and holy days. These little joys, few and far between, had all come to her from the copper pieces gained by the pale, wrinkled, fragrant fruit sold for 2 cents each in the village or the town. "Soldi della Liananina," said her father whenever he put any so gained in his trouser pocket.

Well as he loved his pipe, and thankful was he when he could get a drink of watered wine, he never touched a half-penny of the lemon money to buy a pinch of tobacco or a glass of Mezzo-vino. It was all saved up carefully for his little girl's small wants. Sometimes in hard seasons it had even to go in bread for her, but of that bread he would never himself take a mouthful. As for her, she was a kind child, and Lizina remained quite a child though she grew fast, and her little round breasts swelled up high and firm when the rough hempen shirt cut across them. Young as

she was, the eyes of an admirer had fallen upon her, and young Cecco, the son of Lillo, the contadino where the big pine stood (a pine 300 years old if one), had said to her father and to her that when he had served out his time in the army, he should say something serious about it; but Fringuello had answered him ungraciously that he could never give her bridal clothes or bridal linen, so that she would needs die a maid, and his own people had told him roughly that when he should have served his time he would be in a different mind.

But Cecco, nevertheless, thought nothing would please him ever so well as this ragged pretty child with her blowing cloud of short crisp bright curls, and he said to her one evening as she sat on the wall by the ferry: "If you will be patient, my Liananina, I will be true," and Lizina, too young to be serious, but amused and triumphant, laughed gayly and saucily, and replied to him: "I will make you no promises, Cecco. You will come back with a shorn pate and soiled hands and tender soles."

For the soldier seems but a poor creature to the children of the soil, and is, indeed, of but little use when the barracks vomit him out of their laws and send him back to his poor, indifferent, drooping, but also a spoiled peasant, having learned to write, indeed, but having forgotten how to handle a spade, drive a plow, or prune a grapevine, and to whose feet, once hard as firm like leather, the once familiar earth, with its stones and thorns and sticks, seems rough and sharp and painful after having marched in ill-fitting boots for three years along smooth roads and paved streets.

To the city lad and lass the conscript may seem somebody very fine, but to the country ones he seems but a mere popinjay, only useful for waste powder. Lizina, although only a river laborer's daughter, was country born and bred, and had the prejudices and preferences of the country, and had run about under the orchard bogies and down the vinepergale of the country side until she thought as a peasant and spoke as one.

Cecco was mortified, but he shared her views of the life to which he was about to go. It was useful now to tame a steer, to milk a heifer, to fell a tree, to mow a meadow, to reap a field, to get up in the dark and drive the colt into the city with a load of straw and bring back a load of manure; but the barracks he would be nothing, worse than nothing; a poor numbskull strapped up in stiff clothes with a pack on his back, and a musket, which he must fire at nothing, on his shoulder.

"Wait for me, Lizina," he said sadly. "The time will soon pass and I will come back and marry you, despite them all." "Pooh! I shall have married a man with a mint of money by the time they let you come back," said the unkind child, saucily tossing the curls out of her eye; but through her long lashes her glance rested a moment softly on the ruddy face of Cecco, which had looked down on her often through the boughs and twigs of the cherry or pear trees of his father's farm, as he threw down fruit into her outstretched and eager little hands, where she stood in the grass of the orchard.

She said nothing more tender than, being coy and wayward, and hard to please, became her incipient womanhood; but before she went to bed that night she came close to her father's side and put her hand in his. Cecco says he will come back to marry me, Babbo!" she said with a child's directness. Her father stroked her curls. "That is a joke, dear; his people would never let him marry a little penniless chit like you," he said with a child's directness. Lizina shook her head eagerly with a little proud smile.

"He will not mind his people. He will do it—if I wish—when he comes back." Her father looked at her in amazement; in his eyes she was only a little child still. "Why, baby, you speak like a woman!" he said stupidly. "I am glad this lad goes away, as he puts such nonsense into your head."

"But if we both wish, you would not mind, Babbo?" she asked, persistent and audacious. "The angels save us! She speaks like a grown woman!" cried her father. "My poor little dear," he thought sadly, "you will never be able to wed anyone. We are poor! I can never give you even a pair of shifts. Who could go to a house so make a rag as one man say? My poor little angel, you must live a maid or go to a husband as beggared as I."

He wished to say all this, but the words choked him in his throat. It seemed so cruel to set before the child the harsh, mean demands of life, the merciless rules and habits of that narrow world of theirs, which was bounded by the river and the sand on one side, and the cornfields and orchards on the other.

"Let be, let be," he said to himself. "She is but a child, and the youth is going away for years; if it please her to think of this thing it can hurt no one. He will forget, and she will forget." So he patted her pretty brown cheek, and drew her closer and kissed her. "You are but a baby my treasure," he said, softly. "Put these grave thoughts out of your head. Many moons will wax and wane before Cecco will be free again to come to his old home. The future can take care of itself. I will say no more. I am glad this lad goes away, as he puts such nonsense into your head. Many moons will wax and wane before Cecco will be free again to come to his old home. The future can take care of itself. I will say no more. I am glad this lad goes away, as he puts such nonsense into your head."

The tears started in his eyes. "Ah! God knows, dear, how sweet it would be to me!" He thought of his little girl, safe and happy for her lifetime in that pleasant and plentiful household under the red-brown roofs where the big pine grew among the pear and cherry trees. The vision of it was beautiful and impossible. It hurt him to look on it, as the sun dazes the eyes at noon.

[To Be Continued To-Morrow.]

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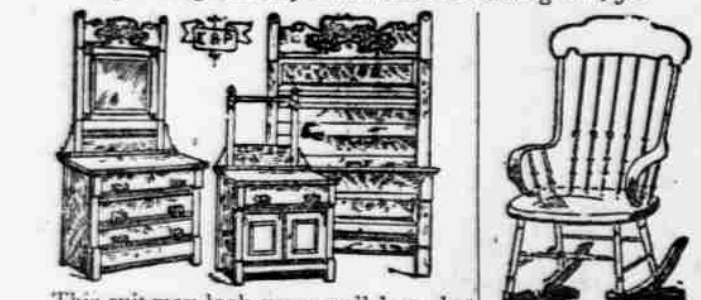
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\$12 Chiffoniers,	9.00	\$150 Parlor Suits,	115.00
\$18 Chiffoniers,	13.00	\$10 Hall Racks,	7.50
\$25 Chiffoniers,	19.00	\$20 Hall Racks,	16.00
\$35 Chiffoniers,	28.00	\$40 Hall Racks,	30.00
\$35 Extension Tables,	1.90	\$25 Bookcases,	20.00
\$16 Exten. Tables,	11.00	\$35 Bookcases,	26.00
\$35 Exten. Tables,	26.00	\$42 Bookcases,	29.00
\$45 Exten. Tables,	35.00	\$50 Bookcases,	38.00
\$2 Parlor Tables,	1.00	\$17 Sideboards,	12.00
\$4 Parlor Tables,	2.90	\$40 Sideboards,	31.00
\$8 Parlor Tables,	5.75	\$75 Sideboards,	58.00
\$15 Parlor Tables,	11.00		

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1 Coffee Boiler, 1 Tin Cup,  
1 Saucepan, 1 Dipper,  
2 Pie Plates, 1 Spoon,  
1 Cook Pan, 1 Meat Fork,  
1 Pot Cover, 3 Bread Pans,  
1 Pepper Box, 1 Cake Pan,  
1 Nutmeg Grater, 4 Cookie Pans,  
1 Cake Cutter, 1 Cake Turner.



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