

*THE OGRE*

THERE lived, once upon a time, in the land of Marigliano, a poor woman called Masella, who had six pretty daughters, all as upright as young fir-trees, and an only son called Antonio, who was so simple as to be almost an idiot. Hardly a day passed without his mother saying to him, 'What are you doing, you useless creature? If you weren't too stupid to look after yourself, I would order you to leave the house and never to let me see your face again.'

Every day the youth committed some fresh piece of folly, till at last Masella, losing all patience, gave him a good beating, which so startled Antonio that he took to his heels and never stopped running till it was dark and the stars were shining in the heavens. He wandered on for some time, not knowing where to go, and at last he came to a cave, at the mouth of which sat an ogre, uglier than anything you can conceive.

He had a huge head and wrinkled brow—eyebrows that met, squinting eyes, a flat broad nose, and a great gash of a mouth from which two huge tusks stuck out. His skin was hairy, his arms enormous, his legs like sword blades, and his feet as flat as ducks'. In short, he was the most hideous and laughable object in the world.

But Antonio, who, with all his faults, was no coward, and was moreover a very civil-spoken lad, took off his hat, and said: 'Good-day, sir; I hope you are pretty well.

Could you kindly tell me how far it is from here to the place where I wish to go?'



When the ogre heard this extraordinary question he burst out laughing, and as he liked the youth's polite manners he said to him : ' Will you enter my service ? '

‘What wages do you give?’ replied Antonio.

‘If you serve me faithfully,’ returned the ogre, ‘I’ll be bound you’ll get enough wages to satisfy you.’

So the bargain was struck, and Antonio agreed to become the ogre’s servant. He was very well treated, in every way, and he had little or no work to do, with the result that in a few days he became as fat as a quail, as round as a barrel, as red as a lobster, and as impudent as a bantam-cock.

But, after two years, the lad got weary of this idle life, and longed desperately to visit his home again. The ogre, who could see into his heart and knew how unhappy he was, said to him one day: ‘My dear Antonio, I know how much you long to see your mother and sisters again, and because I love you as the apple of my eye, I am willing to allow you to go home for a visit. Therefore, take this donkey, so that you may not have to go on foot; but see that you never say “Bricklebrit” to him, for if you do you’ll be sure to regret it.’

Antonio took the beast without as much as saying thank you, and jumping on its back he rode away in great haste; but he hadn’t gone two hundred yards when he dismounted and called out ‘Bricklebrit.’

No sooner had he pronounced the word than the donkey opened its mouth and poured forth rubies, emeralds, diamonds and pearls, as big as walnuts.

Antonio gazed in amazement at the sight of such wealth, and joyfully filling a huge sack with the precious stones, he mounted the donkey again and rode on till he came to an inn. Here he got down, and going straight to the landlord, he said to him: ‘My good man, I must ask you to stable this donkey for me. Be sure you give the poor beast plenty of oats and hay, but beware of saying the word “Bricklebrit” to him, for if you do I can promise you will regret it. Take this heavy sack, too, and put it carefully away for me.’

The landlord, who was no fool, on receiving this strange warning, and seeing the precious stones sparkling through the canvas of the sack, was most anxious to see what would happen if he used the forbidden word. So he gave Antonio an excellent dinner, with a bottle of fine old wine, and prepared a comfortable bed for him. As soon as he saw the poor simpleton close his eyes and had heard his lusty snores, he hurried to the stables and said to the donkey 'Bricklebrit,' and the animal as usual poured out any number of precious stones.

When the landlord saw all these treasures he longed to get possession of so valuable an animal, and determined to steal the donkey from his foolish guest. As soon as it was light next morning Antonio awoke, and having rubbed his eyes and stretched himself about a hundred times he called the landlord and said to him: 'Come here, my friend, and produce your bill, for short reckonings make long friends.'

When Antonio had paid his account he went to the stables and took out his donkey, as he thought, and fastening a sack of gravel, which the landlord had substituted for his precious stones, on the creature's back, he set out for his home.

No sooner had he arrived there than he called out: 'Mother, come quickly, and bring table-cloths and sheets with you, and spread them out on the ground, and you will soon see what wonderful treasures I have brought you.'

His mother hurried into the house, and opening the linen-chest where she kept her daughters' wedding outfits, she took out table-cloths and sheets made of the finest linen, and spread them flat and smooth on the ground. Antonio placed the donkey on them, and called out 'Bricklebrit.' But this time he met with no success, for the donkey took no more notice of the magic word than he would have done if a lyre had been twanged in his ear. Two, three, and four times did Antonio pronounce



‘Bricklebrit,’ but all in vain, and he might as well have spoken to the wind.

Disgusted and furious with the poor creature, he seized a thick stick and began to beat it so hard that he nearly broke every bone in its body. The miserable donkey was so distracted at such treatment that, far from pouring out precious stones, it only tore and dirtied all the fine linen.

When poor Masella saw her table-cloths and sheets being destroyed, and that instead of becoming rich she had only been made a fool of, she seized another stick and belaboured Antonio so unmercifully with it, that he fled before her, and never stopped till he reached the ogre’s cave.

When his master saw the lad returning in such a sorry plight, he understood at once what had happened to him, and making no bones about the matter, he told Antonio what a fool he had been to allow himself to be so imposed upon by the landlord, and to let a worthless animal be palmed off on him instead of his magic donkey.

Antonio listened humbly to the ogre’s words, and vowed solemnly that he would never act so foolishly again. And so a year passed, and once more Antonio was overcome by a fit of home-sickness, and felt a great longing to see his own people again.

Now the ogre, although he was so hideous to look upon, had a very kind heart, and when he saw how restless and unhappy Antonio was, he at once gave him leave to go home on a visit. At parting he gave him a beautiful table-cloth, and said : ‘Give this to your mother ; but see that you don’t lose it as you lost the donkey, and till you are safely in your own house beware of saying “Table-cloth, open,” and “Table-cloth, shut.” If you do, the misfortune be on your own head, for I have given you fair warning.’

Antonio set out on his journey, but hardly had he got

out of sight of the cave than he laid the table-cloth on the ground and said, 'Table-cloth, open.' In an instant the table-cloth unfolded itself and disclosed a whole mass of precious stones and other treasures.

When Antonio perceived this he said, 'Table-cloth, shut,' and continued his journey. He came to the same inn again, and calling the landlord to him, he told him to put the table-cloth carefully away, and whatever he did not to say 'Table-cloth, open,' or 'Table-cloth, shut,' to it.

The landlord, who was a regular rogue, answered, 'Just leave it to me, I will look after it as if it were my own.'

After he had given Antonio plenty to eat and drink, and had provided him with a comfortable bed, he went straight to the table-cloth and said, 'Table-cloth, open.' It opened at once, and displayed such costly treasures that the landlord made up his mind on the spot to steal it.

When Antonio awoke next morning, the host handed him over a table-cloth exactly like his own, and carrying it carefully over his arm, the foolish youth went straight to his mother's house, and said: 'Now we shall be rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and need never go about in rags again, or lack the best of food.'

With these words he spread the table-cloth on the ground and said, 'Table-cloth, open.'

But he might repeat the injunction as often as he pleased, it was only waste of breath, for nothing happened. When Antonio saw this he turned to his mother and said: 'That old scoundrel of a landlord has done me once more; but he will live to repent it, for if I ever enter his inn again, I will make him suffer for the loss of my donkey and the other treasures he has robbed me of.'

Masella was in such a rage over her fresh disappointment that she could not restrain her impatience, and, turning on Antonio, she abused him soundly, and told

him to get out of her sight at once, for she would never acknowledge him as a son of hers again. The poor boy was very depressed by her words, and slunk back to his master like a dog with his tail between his legs. When the ogre saw him, he guessed at once what had happened. He gave Antonio a good scolding, and said, 'I don't know what prevents me smashing your head in, you useless ne'er-do-well! You blurt everything out, and your long tongue never ceases wagging for a moment. If you had remained silent in the inn this misfortune would never have overtaken you, so you have only yourself to blame for your present suffering.'

Antonio listened to his master's words in silence, looking for all the world like a whipped dog. When he had been three more years in the ogre's service he had another bad fit of home-sickness, and longed very much to see his mother and sisters again.

So he asked for permission to go home on a visit, and it was at once granted to him. Before he set out on his journey the ogre presented him with a beautifully carved stick and said, 'Take this stick as a remembrance of me; but beware of saying, "Rise up, Stick," and "Lie down, Stick," for if you do, I can only say I wouldn't be in your shoes for something.'

Antonio took the stick and said, 'Don't be in the least alarmed, I'm not such a fool as you think, and know better than most people what two and two make.'

'I'm glad to hear it,' replied the ogre, 'but words are women, deeds are men. You have heard what I said, and forewarned is forearmed.'

This time Antonio thanked his master warmly for all his kindness, and started on his homeward journey in great spirits; but he had not gone half a mile when he said 'Rise up, Stick.'

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the stick rose and began to rain down blows on poor Antonio's back with such lightning-like rapidity that he had hardly

strength to call out, 'Lie down, Stick;' but as soon as he uttered the words the stick lay down, and ceased beating his back black and blue.

Although he had learnt a lesson at some cost to himself, Antonio was full of joy, for he saw a way now of revenging himself on the wicked landlord. Once more he arrived at the inn, and was received in the most friendly and hospitable manner by his host. Antonio greeted him cordially, and said: 'My friend, will you kindly take care of this stick for me? But, whatever you do, don't say "Rise up, Stick." If you do, you will be sorry for it, and you needn't expect any sympathy from me.'

The landlord, thinking he was coming in for a third piece of good fortune, gave Antonio an excellent supper; and after he had seen him comfortably to bed, he ran to the stick, and calling to his wife to come and see the fun, he lost no time in pronouncing the words 'Rise up, Stick.'

The moment he spoke the stick jumped up and beat the landlord so unmercifully that he and his wife ran screaming to Antonio, and, waking him up, pleaded for mercy.

When Antonio saw how successful his trick had been, he said: 'I refuse to help you, unless you give me all that you have stolen from me, otherwise you will be beaten to death.'

The landlord, who felt himself at death's door already, cried out: 'Take back your property, only release me from this terrible stick;' and with these words he ordered the donkey, the table-cloth, and other treasures to be restored to their rightful owner.

As soon as Antonio had recovered his belongings he said 'Stick, lie down,' and it stopped beating the landlord at once.

Then he took his donkey and table-cloth and arrived safely at his home with them. This time the magic

words had the desired effect, and the donkey and tablecloth provided the family with treasures untold. Antonio very soon married off his sister, made his mother rich for life, and they all lived happily for ever after.

[From the Italian, *Kletke*.]