AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

The lamplights now glimmered through the engirdling trees, conveying a sense of great snugness and comfort inside, and rendering at the same time the unlighted country without strangely solitary and vacant in aspect, considering its nearness to life. The difference between burgh and champaign was increased, too, by sounds which now reached them above others—the notes of a brass band. The travellers wandered down the High Street, where there were timber houses with overhanging stories, whose small-paned lattices were screened by dimity curtains on a drawing-string, and under whose barge-boards old cobwebs waved in the breeze. There were houses of brick-nogging, which derived their chief support from those adjoining. There were slate roofs patched with tiles, and tile roofs patched with slate, with occasionally a roof of thatch.

The agricultural and pastoral character of the people upon whom the town depended for its existence was shown by the class of objects displayed in the shop-windows. Scythe, reap-hooks, sheep-shears, bill-hooks, spades, mattocks, and hoes at the ironmonger's; beehives, butter-firkins, churns, milking-stools and pails, hay-rakes, field-flagons, and seed-lips at the cooper's; cart-ropes and plough-harness at the saddler's; corn-drills and winnowing-machines at the wheelwright's and machinist's; horse-embrocations at the chemist's; at the glover's and leather-cutter's hedging-gloves, thatcher's knee-caps, ploughman's leggings, villager's pattens and clogs.

They came to a grizzled church, whose massive square tower rose unbroken into the darkening sky, the lower parts being illuminated by the nearest lamps sufficiently to show how completely the mortar from the joints of the stonework had been nibbled out by time and weather, which had planted in the crevices thus made little tufts of stone-crop and grass almost as far up as the very battlements. From this tower the clock struck eight, and thereupon a bell began to toll with a peremptory clang. The curfew was still rung in Casterbridge, and it was utilised by the inhabitants as a signal for shutting their shops. No sooner did the deep notes of the bell throb between the house-fronts than a clatter of shutters arose through the whole length of the High Street. In a few minutes business at Casterbridge was ended for the day.

Other clocks struck eight from time to time—one gloomily from the gaol, another from the gable of an almshouse, with a preparative creak of machinery, more audible than the note of the bell; a row of tall, varnished case-clocks from the interior of a watchmaker's shop joined in one after another just as the shutters were enclosing them, like a row of actors delivering their final speeches before the fall of the curtain; then chimes were heard stammering out the Sicilian Mariners' Hymn; so that chronologists of the advanced school were appreciably on their way to the next hour before the whole business of the old one was satisfactorily wound up.

In an open space before the church walked a woman with her gown-sleeves rolled up so high that the edge of her under-linen was visible, and her skirt tucked up through her pocket-hole. She carried a loaf under her arm, from roaring dinners"—waving her hand towhich she was pulling pieces of bread, and handing them to some other women who walked with her; which pieces they nibbled critically. The sight reminded Mrs. Henchard-Newson and her daughter that they had an appetite; and they inquired of the woman for the nearest baker's.

"Ye may as well look for manna-food as good bread in Casterbridge just now," she said, after directing them. "They can blare their trumpets and thump their drums, and have their raoring dinners"—waving her hand towards a point farther down the street, where the brass band could be seen standing in front of an illuminated building—"but we must needs be put-to for want of a wholesome crust. There's less good bread than good beer in Casterbridge now."

"And less good beer than swipes," said a man with his hands in his pockets.

"How does it happen there's no good bread?" asked Mrs. Henchard.

"Oh, 'tis the corn-factor—he's the man that our millers and bakers all deal wi', and he has sold 'em grown wheat, which they didn't know was grown, so they say, till the dough ran all over the ovens like quicksilver; so that the loaves be as flat as toads, and like suet pudden inside. I've been a wife, and I've been a mother, and I never see such unprincipled bread in Casterbridge as this before—— But you must be a real stranger here not to know what's made all the poor folks plim like blowed blathers this week?"

"I am," said Elizabeth's mother shyly.

Not wishing to be observed further till she knew more of her future in this place, she withdrew with her daughter from the speaker's side. Getting a couple of biscuits at the shop indicated, as a temporary substitute for a meal, they next bent their steps instinctively to where the music was playing.

CHAPTER V.

A few score yards brought them to the spot where the town band was now shaking the window-panes with the strains of "The Roast Beef of Old England."

The building before whose doors they had pitched their music-stand was the chief hotel in Casterbridge—namely, The Golden Crown. A spacious bow-window projected into the street over the main portico, and from the open sashes came the babble of voices, the jingle of glasses, and the drawing of corks. The blinds, moreover, being left unclosed, the whole interior of this room could be surveyed from the top of a flight of steps opposite, for which reason a knot of idlers had gathered there.

"We might, perhaps, after all, make a few inquiries about—our relation, Mr. Henchard," whispered Mrs. Newson, who, since her entry into Casterbridge, had seemed strangely weak and agitated. "And this, I think, would be a good place for trying it—just to ask, you know, how he stands in the town—if he is here, as I think he must be. You, Elizabeth-Jane, had better be the one to do it. I'm too worn out to do anything—pull down your fall first."

She sat down upon the lowest step, and Elizabeth-Jane obeyed her directions and stood among the idlers.

"What's going on to-night?" asked the girl after singling out an old man, and standing by him long enough to acquire a neighbourly right to converse.

"Well, ye must be a stranger sure," said the old man, without taking his eyes from the window. "Why, 'tis a great public dinner of the gentle-people and such like leading folk—wi' the Mayor in the chair. As we plainer fellows baint invited, they leave the winder-shutters open that we may get jest a sense o't out here. If you mount the steps you can see 'em. That's Mr. Henchard, the Mayor, at the end of the table, a facing ye; and that's the Council-men right and left. . . Ah, lots of them when they begun life were no more than I be now!"

"Henchard?" said Elizabeth-Jane, surprised, but by no means suspecting the whole force of the revelation. She ascended among the other people to the space at the top of the steps.

Her mother, though her head was bowed, had already caught from the window tones that strangely riveted her attention, before the old man's words. "Mr. Henchard, the Mayor," reached her ears. She arose, and ascended in her daughter's rear as soon as she could do so without showing exceptional eagerness.

The interior of the hotel dining-room was spread out before her, with its tables, and glass, and plate, and inmates. Facing the window, in the chair of dignity, sat a man approaching forty years of age; of heavy frame, large features, and commanding voice; his general build being rather coarse than compact. He had a rich complexion, which verged on swarthiness, a flashing black eye, and dark, bushy brows and hair. When he indulged in an occasional loud laugh at some remark among the guests his large mouth parted so far back as to show to the rays of the chandelier a full score or more of the two-and-thirty sound white teeth that he obviously still could boast of.

That laugh was not encouraging to strangers; and hence it may have been well that it was rarely heard. Many theories might have been built upon it. It fell in well with conjectures of a temperament which would have no pity for weakness, but would be ready to yield ungrudging admiration to greatness and strength. Its producer's personal goodness, if he had any, would be of a very fitful cast—an occasional almost oppressive generosity rather than a mild and constant kindness.

Susan Henchard's husband—in law, at least—sat before them, matured in shape, stiffened in line, exaggerated in traits; disciplined, thought-marked—in a word, older. Elizabeth, encumbered with no recollections as her mother was, regarded him with nothing more than the keen curiosity and interest which discovery of such unexpected social standing in the long-sought relative naturally begot. He was dressed in an old-fashioned evening suit, an expanse of frilled shirt showing on his broad breast; jewelled studs; and a heavy gold chain. Three glasses stood at his right hand; but, to his wife's surprise, the two for wine were empty, while the third, a tumbler, was half full of water.

When last she had seen him he was sitting in a light fustian jacket, corduroy waitscoat and breeches, and tanned leather leggings, with a basin of hot furmity before him. Time, the magician, had wrought much here. Watching him, and thus thinking of past days, she became so moved that she shrank back against the jamb of the deep doorway to which the steps gave access, the shadow from it conveniently hiding her features. She forgot her daughter, till a touch from Elizabeth aroused her. "Have you seen him, mother?" whispered the girl.

"Yes, yes," answered her companion hastily. "I have seen him, and it is enough for me! Now I only want to go—pass away—die."

"Why—O what?" She drew closer, and whispered in her mother's ear, "Does he seem to you not likely to befriend us? I thought he looked a generous man. What a gentleman he is, isn't he? and how his diamond studs shine! How strange that you should have said he might be in the stocks or in the workhouse, or dead! Did ever anything go more by contraries! Why do you feel so afraid of him? I am not at all; I'll call upon him—he can but say he don't own such remote kin."

"I don't know at all—I can't tell what to set about. I feel so down."

"Don't be that, mother, now we have got here and all! Rest there where you be a little while—I will look on and find out more about him."

"I don't think I can ever meet Mr. Henchard. He is not how I thought he would be—he overpowers me. I don't wish to see him any more."

"But wait a little time and consider."

Elizabeth-Jane had never been so much interested in anything in her life as in their present position, partly from the natural elation she felt at discovering herself akin to a coach; and she gazed again at the scene. The younger guests were talking and eating with animation; their elders were searching for tid-bits, and sniffing and grunting over their plates like sows nuzzling for acorns. Three drinks seemed to be sacred to the company—port, sherry, and rum; outside which old-established trinity few or no palates ranged.

A row of ancient rummers with ground figures on their sides, and each primed with a spoon, was now placed down the table, and these were promptly tilled with grog at such high temperatures as to raise serious considerations for the articles exposed to its vapours. But Elizabeth-Jane noticed that, though this filling went on with great promptness up and down the table, nobody filled the Mayor's glass, who still drank large quantities of water from the tumbler behind the clump of crystal vessels intended for wine and spirits.

"They don't fill Mr. Henchard's wine-glasses," she ventured to say to her elbow acquaintance, the old man.

"Oh no; don't ye know him to be the celebrated abstaining worthy of that name? He scorns all tempting liquors; never touches nothing. Oh yes, he've strong qualities that way. I have heard tell that he sware a gospel oath in bygone times, and has bode by it ever since. So they don't press him, knowing it would be unbecoming in the face of that; for yer gospel oath is a serious thing."

"Another elderly man, hearing this discourse, now joined in by inquiring, "How much longer have he got to suffer from it, Solomon Longways?"

"Another two year they say. I don't know the why and the wherefore of his fixing such a time, for a' never has told anybody. But 'tis exactly two calendar years longer, they say. A powerful mind to hold out so long!"

"True. . . . . But there's great strength in hope. Knowing that in four-and-twenty months' time ye'll be out of your bondage, and able to make up for all you've suffered, by partaking without stint; why, it keeps a man up, no doubt."

"No doubt, Christopher Coney, no doubt. And 'a must need such reflections—a lonely widow man," said Longways.

"When did he lose his wife?" asked Elizabeth.

"I never knowed her. 'Twas before he came to Casterbridge." Solomon Longways replied, with terminative emphasis, as if the fact of his ignorance of Mrs. Henchard were sufficient to deprive her history of all interest. "But I know that 'a's a banded teetotaller, and that if any of his men be ever so little overtook by a drop, he's down up-'em as stern as the Lord upon the jovial Jews."

"Has he many men, then?" said Elizabeth-Jane.

"Many? Why, my good maid, he's the powerfullest member of the town-council, and quite a principal man in the country round besides. He and Casterbridge bank-folk are sworn brothers. Never a big dealing in wheat, barley, oats, hay, roots, and such-like in this county but Henchard's got a hand in it. Ay, and he'll go into other things, too; and that's where he makes his mistake. He worked his way up from nothing when 'a came here; and now he's a pillar of the town. Not but what he's been shook a little to-year about his bad corn he has supplied in his contracts. I've seen the sun rise over Casterbridge Moor these nine-and-sixty year, and though Mr. Henchard has never cussed me unfairly ever since I've worked for'n, seeing I be but a little small man, and though 'tis not my interest to spak against him. I must say that I have never before tasted such rough bread as hev been made from Henchard's wheat lately. 'Tis that growed out that ye could a'most call it malt, and there's a list at bottom o' the loaf as thick as the sole of one's shoe."

The band now struck up another melody, and by the time it was ended the dinner was over, and speeches began to be made. The evening being calm, and the windows still open, these orations could be distinctly heard. Henchard's voice arose above the rest; he was telling a story of his hay-dealing experiences, in which he had outwitted a sharper who had been bent on outwitting him.

"Ha-ha-ha!" responded his audience at the upshot of the story; and hilarity was general till a new voice arose with, "This is all very well; but how about the bad bread?"

It came from the lower end of the table, where there sat a group of minor tradesmen who, although part of the company, appeared to be a little below the social level of the others; and who seemed to nourish a certain independence of opinion, and carry on discussions not quite in harmony with those at the head; just as the west end of a church is sometimes persistently found to sing out of time and tune with the leading spirits in the chancel.

This interruption about the bad bread afforded infinite satisfaction to the loungers outside, several of whom were in the mood which finds its pleasure in others' discomfiture; and hence they echoed pretty freely. "Hey! How about the bad bread, Mr. Mayor?" Moreover, feeling none of the restraints of those who shared the feast, they could afford to add, "You rather ought to tell the story o' that, sir!"

The interruption was sufficient to compel the Mayor to notice it.

"Well, I admit that the wheat turned out badly," he said. "But I was taken in in buying it as much as the bakers who bought it o' me.

"And the poor folk had to eat it whether or no," said the inharmonious man outside the window.

Henchard's face darkened. There was temper under the thin bland surface—the temper which, artificially intensified, had banished a wife nearly a score of years before.

"You must make allowances for the accidents of a large business," he said. "You must bear in mind that the weather just at the harvest of that corn was worse than we have known it for years. However, I have mended my arrangements on account o't. Since I have found my business too large to be well looked after by myself alone, I have advertised for a thorough good man as manager of the corn department. When I've got him you will find these mistakes will no longer occur—matters will be better looked into."

"But what are you going to do to repay us for the past?" inquired the man who had before spoken, and who seemed to be a baker or miller. "Will you replace the grown flour we've got by sound grain?"

Henchard's face had grown still more stern at these interruptions, and he drank from his tumbler of water as if to calm himself or gain time. Instead of vouchsafing a direct reply he stiffly observed:

"If anybody will tell me how to turn grown wheat into wholesome wheat, I'll take it back with pleasure. But it can't be done."

Henchard was not to be drawn again. Having said this he sat down.

(To be Continued.)

WOULDN'T SUIT THE FURNITURE.

Doctor—No wonder you are sick. Open the blinds and let the sunshine into your room.

Fair Patient—Mercy! It wouldn't harmonize with this expensive furniture. Sunshine is disgustingly cheap.

HORRORS OF CAPTIVITY.

HOW THE ABYSSINIANS TREATED THE ITALIAN PRISONERS.

Story Told by a Returned Italian Soldier—The Cruelties Practised by the Native Soldiers.

The soldiers who have fought in Africa are returning to their villages now. I sent a word to Private Giovanni de Lucca, of Casarza, that I should feel thankful if he would come and tell me about the war. "The African hero," I said, as he was ushered in—for the "paese" had been ringing with stories of him and four other soldiers, whose relations had worn mourning for them, says a Ligurian letter in the London News.

"So you fought at Abukarima?"

"Yes, indeed," he said. "We had marched and marched, twelve hours at a stretch, I think. Then we lay down. But at midnight we were aroused. 'To Abukarima—eight hours' march,' and we started.

"We had a beautiful position. The Galla cavalry was on our left. We were posted along the ridge of a hill; on the right was what we thought an empty ravine. Very, very soon we knew that some bad thing had happened. How could that be? But we knew it. We said to each other. 'Never mind; the tide may turn again.'"

But by 10 a. m., he and 109 others were down to the ravine, and "it was as full of Abyssinians as an ant hill is of ants."

MAKING THE CHARGE.

"The word came; 'Fix bayonets'! And we went to the charge. We were surrounded, however. My officer said: 'There's nothing to be done. We're prisoners.' And so we were—prisoners of Ras Mangascia; and remained so for forty-one days. But some of the comrades not far off, wounded and unwounded, lay among the dead and dying, firing, firing, till they could not hold a gun for fatigue.

"Then they piled up the corpses of our fellow soldiers—three bodies one over another—to make a gun rest. They took cartridges from the dead around about, and leaned against their dead gun rests, firing for twelve consecutive hours. But we were marched off to Abyssinian huts—dog kennels, half underground, three feet square of an entrance to creep through—ten prisoners together. Some of us were chained close to the ground by the wrist—chained to a stake in the floor. I was never chained that way.

BURNING THE PRISONERS.

"It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and we had had no food for 24 hours. I told our guards we must eat. They brought us a double handful of unground barley and raw lentils, and the same of dried peas; and between every three of us one little bowl of water. We ground the barley between stones and made that flour into a paste with the water, and ate it raw. Lentils and peas we put into our pockets, and munched at them now and then as the hunger drove us. Those were the rations every day for forty-one days.

"We were told that Ras Mangascia had sent word to Gen. Baldissera that as he was burning Abyssinian huts at Adigrat the Ras would burn us Italian prisoners. After we knew that we lived in dread, and some of us wept. The enemy staked the captain of my company. They first gouged out his eyes, and then they lit a fire about him and roasted him on his stake. My general, Brimonte, was killed at Abukarima, but he was killed in fair fight."

"Was it true," I asked, "that they mutilated the wounded?"

"Ah, true, indeed," said Giovanni, in his even, hollow tones. "They cut off their hands and their feet, and burned the poor fellows afterward! And in one hospital—a small hospital—there were 500 without the left leg, and the right arm. After a battle the enemy's cavalry would gallop over the field and thrust again and again at the helpless wounded."

STRUCK WITH IDIOCY.

And he told these horrors without any show of special emotion. What curdled his blood and nearly stopped his speech was, strange to say, "the long teeth—long and white—of the Abyssinians." "They are as long as this," murmured Giovanni, marking off two joints of his large thumb.

One of the misfortunes that befell young Italian soldiers was to be struck with idiocy when they found themselves under fire, Giovanni said, "it happened to many." There was one of them here a few days ago. He was being taken by another soldier to a famous place of pilgrimage, and he was utterly bereft of sense—not mad, but a jabbering idiot. And another danger that all ran was from the poisonous water.

AMONG WILD BEASTS.

Next in horror after the "white, great, long, Abyssinian teeth," comes his remembrance of the wild beasts. "Going up the country," he said, "panthers, lions, leopards, some tigers (and terrible creatures with unknown 'patois' names) came close to us. In the dark something would brush by—but close, close by—a hyena, probably. I saw a panther spring upon a comrade, and take a piece out of the side of his face. I saw another panther tear the back of the neck and head of a man of another regiment.

"When we were coming back, after we were released," he said, "the wild beasts were not so bad. You see, they had been gorged with camel flesh, and, —Italians!

"We took twenty-three days to come out of Ras Mangascia's hands to Adikayeh—a straggling company, nearly worn out, and there's hardly one that can tell the tale that I have told you. Nearly all the others are dead."

And the saddest part seems to me that Giovanni, just back from the wars—Giovanni, who had suffered so much for his country—cannot find a living in Italy, but must go off to Marseilles to work as a day laborer in France.

MUCH IN LITTLE.

Things Worth Thinking About—Knowledge Put Into Nutshells.

The miserable are sacred.

Humor is wit and love.

It is sure the hardest science to forget.

Happiness is a rare cosmetic.

I believe in great men, but not in demigods.

Ideal beauty is a fugitive never located.

The mother's heart is the child's school room.

Our possessions are wholly in our performances.

Calamity is a man's true touchstone.

There are follies as catching as contagious disorders.

Money is like manure, of very little use, except to be spread.

Pleasures bring effeminacy and effeminacy foreruns ruin.

Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds.

In struggling with misfortunes lies the true proof of virtue.

Each succeeding day is the scholar of that which proceeded.

O, friend, so long as I study and practice humility, I know where I am.

Fortitude is the marshal of thought, the armour of the will, and the fort of reason.

Into the composition of every happiness enters the thought of having deserved it.

Whenever the tree of beneficence takes root, it sends forth branches beyond the sky.

Those there are whose hearts have a look southward, and are open to the whole noon of nature.

Charity ever finds in the act reward, and needs no trumpet in the receiver.

Falsehood is susceptible of an infinity of combinations, but truth has only one mode of being.

The charities that soothes and heal and bless are scattered at the feet of man like flowers.

A man intimately acquainted with the nature of things has seldom occasion to be astonished.

Grief or misfortune seems to be indispensable to the development of intelligence, energy and virtue.

In the treatment of nervous cases, he is the best physicain who is the most ingenious inspirer of hope.

Faith is letting down our nets into the transparent deeps, at the divine command, not knowing what we shall take.

Friends are as companions on a journey, who ought to aid each other to persevere in the road to a happier life.

What is fanaticism to-day is the fashionable creed to-morrow, and trite as the multiplication table a week after.

The great lesson of a loss, as the proverb suggests, is determinable, not so much by what we have lost, as by what we have left.

Fun has no limits. It is like the human race and face; there is a family likeness among all the species, but they all differ.

LUNACY IN ENGLAND.

Still on the Increase Among the Pauper Class in That Country.

The fiftieth annual report of the Commissioners in Lunacy for the year 1896 has been presented to parliament, and it shows a continuance in that increase of insanity among the pauper class which for some years, has been steadily progressive. The number of officially known lunatics, idiots and persons of unsound mind in England and Wales on the 1st of January, 1896, was 96,446, being an increase of 2,365 upon the corresponding number on the 1st of January, 1895. This is an increase of 2.5 per cent among the lunatics themselves, and, the population being taken at 30,000,000, it is an increase of about eight in each 10,000 persons, raising the total lunacy of the country to a little over thirty per 10,000. This proportion has advanced from 18.76 per 10,000 in 1859, or, in other words, if the figures can be taken as correct, insanity has nearly doubled itself in the course of thirty-seven years. It is remarkable that the advance has been almost wholly in the pauper class, as the ratio of private patients to population was 2.38 per 10,000 in 1859, and it is no more than 2.69 in the present year, for which in this class there has been a slight reduction in the ratio, while that of the pauper class is 44 higher. The ratio to 10,000 of population in 1886 for the private class was 2.83; and if the same ratio had existed on the 1st of last January, the estimated population then being nearly 31,000,000, there would have been 8,696 private patients instead of the actual number of 8,265. In estimating the value of these figures it must be remembered that a large number of so-called pauper lunatics are persons who sink into the pauper class as a consequence of insanity, and that many of them were previously in respectable positions.

AN EVERY-DAY SCENE.

Pedestrian—What's all that fuss about in that house—wedding?

Resident—No. A new baby arrived last night, and all the women in the neighborhood are going into ecstasies over it.

Who is that tall man all the women are crowding around?

He is a minister, come to fix a date for the christening.

And who is the short man who attracts so much attention?

He is the doctor.

Ah! I see. That no-account fellow, who is being pushed out of the way or run over, is the hired man, I presume?

No; he's the father.

LAWS OF HEALTH.

Tramp—Thankee kindly, mum; I'd no hope of gettin' sich a fine supper today, mum. May Heaven bless ye!

Housekeeper—As' you've had a good supper, I think you might chop some wood.

Yes, mum; but you know the old adage, "After dinner rest a while; after supper walk a mile." I'll walk the mile first, mum.