AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER VI.

Now the group outside the window had within the last few minutes been reinforced by new arrivals, some of them respectable shopkeepers and their assistants, who had come out for a whiff of air after putting up the shutters for the night: some of them of a lower class. Distinct from either their appeared a stranger—a young man of remarkably pleasant aspect, who carried in his hand a carpet-bag of the smart floral pattern prevalent in such articles at that time.

He was fair and ruddy, bright-eyed, and slight in build. He might possibly have passed by without stopping at all, or at most for half a minute to glance in at the scene, had not his advent coincided with the discussion on corn and bread; in which event this history had never been enacted. But the subject seemed to arrest him, and he whispered some inquiries of the other bystanders, and remained listening.

When he heard Henchard's closing words, "It can't be done," he smiled, impulsively drew out his pocket-book, and wrote down a few words by the aid of the light in the window. He tore out the leaf, folded and directed it, and seemed about to throw it in through the open sashupon the dining-table, but, on second thoughts, edged himself through the loiters till he reached the door of the hotel, where one of the waiters who had been serving inside was now idly leaning against the doorpost.

"Give this to the Mayor at once," he said handling in his hasty note.

Elizabeth-Jane had seen his movements and heard the words, which attracted her by their subject and by their accent—a strange one for those parts. It was quaint and northerly.

The waiter took the note, while the young stranger continued:

"And can ye tell me of a respectable hotel that's a little more moderate than this?"

The waiter glanced indifferently up and down the street.

"They say the King of Prussia, just below here, is a very good place," he languidly answered; "but I have never stayed there myself."

The Scotchman, as he seemed to be, thanked him, and strolled on in the direction of the King of Prussia aforesaid, apparently more concerned about the question of an inn than about the fate of his note, now that the momentary impulse of writing it was over. While he was disappearing slowly down the street the waiter left the door, and Elizabeth-Jane saw with some interest the note brought into the dining-room and handed to the Mayor.

Henchard looked at it carelessly, unfolded it with one hand, and glanced it through. Thereupon it was curious to note the unexpected effect. The nettled, clouded aspect which had held possession of his face since the subject of his corn-dealings had been broached, changed itself into one of arrested attention. He read the note slowly, and fell into thought, not moody, but fitfully intense, as that of a man who has been captured by an idea.

By this time toasts and speeches had given place to songs, the wheat subject being quite forgotten. Men were putting their heads together in twos and threes, telling good stories with pantomimic laughter which reached convulsive grimace. Some were beginning to look as if they did not know how they had come there, what they had come for, or how they were going to get home again; and provisionally sat on with a dazed smile. Square-built men showed a tendency to become hunchbacks, men with a dignified presence lost it in curious obliquity of figure, in which their features grew disarranged and one-sided; whilst the heads of a few who had dined with extreme thoroughness were somehow sinking into their shoulders, the corners of their mouth and eyes being bent upwards by the subsidence. Only Henchard did not conform to these flexuous changes; he remained stately and vertical, silently thinking.

The clock struck nine; Elizabeth-Jane turned to her companion. "The evening is drawing on, mother," she said. "What do you propose to do?"

She was surprised to find how irresolute her mother had become. "We must get a place to lie down in," she murmured; "I have seen—Mr. Henchard; and that's all I wanted to do."

"That's enough for to-night at any rate," Elizabeth-Jane replied soothingly. "We can think to-morrow what is best to do about him. The question now si—is it not?—how shall we find a lodging?"

As her mother did not reply, Elizabeth-Jane's mind reverted to the words of the waiter, that the King of Prussia was an inn of moderate charges. A recommendation good for one person was probably good for another. "Let's go where the young man has gone to," she said. "He is respectable. What do you say?"

Her mother assented, and down the street they went.

In the meantime the Mayor's thoughtfulness, engendered by the note as stated, continued to hold him in abstraction; till, whispering to his neighbor to take his place, he found opportunity to leave the chair. This was just after the departure of his wife and Elizabeth.

Outside the door of the assembly-room he saw the waiter, and beckoning to him, asked who brought the note which had been handed in a quarter of an hour before.

"A young man, sir—a sort of traveler. He was a Scotchman seemingly."

"Did he say how he had got it?"

"He wrote it himself, sir, as he stood outside the window."

"Oh—wrote it himself. . . . Is the young man in the hotel?"

"No, sir. He went to the King of Prussia, I believe."

The Mayor walked up and down the vestibule of the hotel with his hands under his coat-tails, as if he were merely seeking a cooler atmosphere than that of the room he had quitted. But there could be no doubt that he was in reality still possessed to the full by the new idea, whatever it might be. At length he went back to the door of the dining-room, paused and found that the songs, toasts, and conversation were proceeding quite satisfactorily without his presence. The corporation, private residents, and major and minor tradesmen had, in fact, gone in for comforting beverages to such an extent that they had quite forgotten, not only the Mayor, but all those vast political, religious, and social differences which they felt necessary to maintain in the daytime, and which separated them like iron grills. Seeing this, the Mayor took his hat, and when the waiter had helped him on with a thin holland overcoat, went out and stood under the portico.

Very few persons were now in the street; and his eyes, by a sort of attraction, turned and dwelt upon a spot about a hundred yards farther down. It was the house to which the writer of the note had gone—the King of Prussia—whose two prominent gables, bow-window, and passage-light could be seen from where he stood. Having kept his eye on it for a while, he strolled in that direction.

This immutable house of accommodation for man and beast was built of mellow sandstone, with mullioned windows of the same material, now markedly out of perpendicular from the settlement of foundations. The bow-windows projecting into the street, whose interior was so popular among the frequenters of the inn, was closed with shutters, in each of which appeared a heart-shaped aperture, somewhat more attenuated in the right and left ventricles than is seen in Nature. Inside these illuminated holes, at a distance of about three inches, were ranged at this hour, as every passer knew, the ruddy polls of Billy Wills the glazier, Smart the shoemaker, Buzzford the general dealer, and others of that set, each with his yard of clay.

A four-centred Tudor arch was over the entrance, and over the arch the signboard, how visible in the rays of an opposite lamp. Hereon, the King, who had been represented by the artist as a person of two dimensions only—in other words, flat as a shadow—was seated on a war-horse in a paralysed prance. Being on the sunny side of the street, both he and his charger had suffered largely from warping, splitting, fading, and shrinkage, so that he was but a half invisible film upon the reality of the grain, and knots, and nails, which composed the signboard. As a matter of fact, this state of things was not so much owing to Stannidge the landlord's neglect, as from the lack of a painter in Casterbridge who would undertake to reproduce the uniform of a man so traditional.

A long, narrow, dimly-lit passage gave access to the inn, within which passage the horses going to their stalls at the back, and the coming and departing human guests, rubbed shoulders indiscriminately, the latter running no slight risk of having their toes trodden upon by the animals. The good stabling and the good ale of the King of Prussia, though somewhat difficult to reach on account of there being but this narrow way to both, were nevertheless, perseveringly sought out by the sagacious old heads who knew what was what in Casterbridge.

Henchard stood without the inn for a few instants; then, lowering the dignity of his presence as much as possible by buttoning the brown holland coat over his shirt-front, and in other ways toning himself down to his ordinary everyday appearance, he entered the inn door.

CHAPTER VII.

Elizabeth-Jane and her mother had arrived some twenty minutes earlier. Outside the house they had stood and considered whether even this homely place, though recommended as moderate, might not be too serious in its prices for their light pockets. Finally, however, they had found courage to enter, and duly met Stannidge, the landlord; a silent man, who drew and carried frothing measures to this room and to that, shoulder to shoulder with his waiting-maids—a stately slowness, however, entering into his ministrations by contrast with theirs, as became one whose service was somewhat optional. It would have been altogether optional but for the orders of the landlady, a person who sat in the bar, corporeally motionless, but with a flitting eye and quick ear, with which she observed and heard through the open door and hatchway the pressing needs of customers whom her husband overlooked though close at hand. Elizabeth and her mother were passively accepted as sojourners, and shown to a small bedroom under one of the gables, where they sat down.

The principle of the inn seemed to be to compensate for the antique awkwardness, crookedness, and obscurity of the passages, floors, and ceilings, by quantities of clean linen spread about everywhere, and this had a dazzling effect upon the travellers.

"'Tis too good for us—we can't meet it!" said the elder woman, looking round the apartment with misgiving as soon as they were left alone.

"I fear it is too," said Elizabeth. "But we must be respectable."

"We must pay our way even before we must be respectable," replied her mother. "Mr. Henchard is too high for us to make ourselves known to him, I much fear; so we've only our own pockets to depend on."

"I know what I'll do," said Elizabeth-Jane, after an interval of waiting, during which their needs seemed quite forgotten under the press of business below. And leaving the room, she descended the stairs and penetrated to the bar.

If there was one good thing more than another which characterised this single-hearted girl, it was a willingness to sacrifice her personal comfort and dignity to the common weal.

"As you seem busy here to-night, and mother's not well off, might I take out part of our accommodation by helpin?" she asked of the landlady.

The latter, who remained as fixed in the arm-chair as if she had been melted into it, when in a liquid state, and could not now be unstuck, looked the girl up and down inquiringly, with her hands on the chair-arms. Such arrangements as the one Elizabeth proposed were not uncommon in country villages; but, though Casterbridge was old-fashioned, the custom was well obsolete here. The mistress of the house, however, was an easy woman to strangers, and she made no objection. Thereupon Elizabeth, being instructed by nods and notions from the taciturn landlord as to where she could find the different things, trotted up and down stairs with materials for her own and her parent's meal.

While she was doing this, the wood partition in the centre of the house thrilled to its centre with the tugging of a bell-pull upstairs. A bell below tinkled a note that was feebler in sound than the twanging of wires and cranks that had produced it.

"'Tis the Scotch gentleman," said the landlady omnisciently; and, turning her eyes to Elizabeth: "Now then, can you go and see if his supper is on the tray? If it is, you can take it up to him. The front room over this."

Elizabeth-Jane, though hungry, willingly postponed serving herself a while, and applied to the cook in the kitchen, whence she brought forth the tray of supper viands, and proceeded with it upstairs to the apartment indicated. The accommodation of the King of Prussia was far from spacious, despite the fair area of ground it covered. The room demanded by intrusive beams and rafters, partitions, passages, staircases, left comparatively small quarters for human beings. Moreover, this being at a time before home-brewing was abandoned by the smaller victuallers, and a house in which the twelve-bushel strength was still religiously adhered to by the landlord in his ale, the quality of the liquor was the chief attraction of the premises, so that everything had to make way for utensils and operations in connection therewith. Thus Elizabeth found that the Scotchman was located in a room quite close to the small one that had been allotted to herself and her mother.

When she entered nobody was present but the young man himself—the same whom she had seen lingering without the windows of the Golden Crown Hotel. He was now idly reading a copy of the local paper, and was hardly conscious of her entry, so that she looked at him quite coolly, and saw how his forehead shone where the light caught it, and how nicely his hair was cut, and the sort of velvet-pile or down that was on the skin at the back of his neck, and how his cheek was so truly curved as to be part of a globe, and how clearly drawn were the lids and lashes which hid his bent eyes.

She set down the tray, spread his supper, and went away without a word. On her arrival below, the landlady, who was as kind as she was fat and lazy, saw that Elizabeth-Jane was rather tired, though in her earnestness to be useful she was waiving her own needs altogether. Mrs. Stannidge thereupon said, with a considerate peremptoriness, that she and her mother had better take their own suppers if they meant to have any.

Elizabeth fetched their simple provisions, as she had fetched the Scotchman's and went up to the little chamber where she had left her mother, noiselessly pushing open the door with the edge of the tray. To her surprise her mother, instead of being reclined on the bed where she had left her, was in an erect position, with lips parted. At Elizabeth's entry she lifted her finger.

The meaning of this was soon apparent. The room allotted to the two women had at one time served as a dressing-room to the Scotchman's chamber; as was evidenced by signs of a door of communication between them— now screwed up and pasted over with the wall paper. But, as is frequently the case wich hotels of far higher pretensions than the King of Prussia, every word spoken in either of these rooms was distinctly audible in the other. Such sounds came through now.

Thus silently conjured, Elizabeth deposited the tray, and her mother whispered as she drew near, "'Tis he."

"Who?" said the girl.

"The Mayor."

The tremors in Susan Henchard's tone might have led any person but one so perfectly unsuspicious of the truth as the girl was, to surmise some closer connection than the admitted simple kinship as a means of accounting for them.

Two men were indeed talking in the adjoining chamber, the young Scotchman and Henchard, who, having entered the inn while Elizabeth-Jane was in the kitchen waiting for the supper, had been deferentially conducted upstairs by host Stannidge himself. The girl noiselessly laid out their little meal, and beckoned to her mother to join her, which Mrs. Henchard mechanically did, her attention being fixed on the conversation through the door.

"I merely strolled in on my way home to ask you a question about something that has excited my curiosity," said the Mayor, with careless geniality. "But I see you have not finished supper."

"Ay, but I will have done in a few minutes! Ye needn't go, sir. Take a seat. I've almost done, and it makes no difference at all."

Henchard seemed to take the seat offered, and in a moment he resumed: "Well, first I should ask, did you write this?" A rustling of paper followed.

"Yes, I did," said the Scotchman.

"Then," said Henchard, "I am under the impression that we have met by accident while waiting for the morning to keep an appointment with each other? My name is Henchard; ha'n't you replied to an advertisement for a corn-factor's manager that I put into the paper—ha'n't you come here to see me about it?"

"No," said the Scotchman, with some surprise.

"Surely you are the man," went on Henchard, insistingly, "who arranged to come and see me? Joshua, Joshua, Jipp—Jopp—what was his name?"

"No, indeed," said the young man. "My name is Donald Farfrae. It is true I am in the corern trade—but I have replied to no advarrtisment, and arranged to see no one. I am on my way to Bristol—from there to the other side of the warrld to try my fortune in the great wheat-growing districts of the West! I have some inventions useful to the trade, and there is no scope for developing heere."

(To be Continued.)

SHORT ALL AROUND.

These are hard times, indeed. Even the days are getting short.

FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE.

LEVIATHAN OF THE SEA SUCCUMBS TO A JOINT ATTACK.

A Swordfish and a Jasper Whale Kill a Monster Sperm Whale in View of a Steamer's Passengers—A Game Fight, But It Ended in Death.

A whale fight is one of the most remarkable sights seen by sailors and ocean voyagers. The combat of the mighty leviathans of the deep is grand and impressive. In fact, those who have been fortunate enough to witness a whale fight will ever remember the unique scene.

There are three actors in a whale combat—a true whale, a jasper whale and a swordfish. It is necessary for a true, or sperm, whale to come to the surface of the water to breathe and blow, while the jasper whale is like any other fish in that respect.

The Bay of Biscay, that generally turbulent sea, which has swallowed thousands of ships, was on a recent trip of the Union steamship Mexican as smooth as a mirror. It did not seem possible this peaceful sea would ever lash itself into the furies of the gale. The passengers of the Mexican were startled early on Thursday morning by the lookout man crying out: "A whale fight, right on the starboard bow!" Everybody became at once excited. The Captain eased the speed of the boat, and headed directly for the combatants. The steamer was stopped when within a short distance, from whence all could view this tragic scene of ocean life.

THEIR MANNER OF FIGHTING.

'Twas a wondrous sight that met the gaze of the on-lookers. A mighty sperm whale was lashing the sea with its tail until four yards around the water had become milky white. Fiercer each moment became the struggle between the sperm whale and his two deadly opponents. The manner by which the jasper whale and sword fish attack the spermer is a rather peculiar one, and as to why there is that deadly hatred between these monsters of the deep remains unsolved.

The jasper whale grasps the sperm whale by the lower jaw, while the swordfish is dealing blows to the victim underneath. As the moments pass, and it becomes necessary for the spermer to come to the surface to breathe, the struggle becomes more acute. Relentless is the hold of the jasper, and equally as cruel are the darts of the swordfish as that mighty weapon enters deep into the vital parts of the doomed whale, for not one in ten thousand ever escapes from this encounter. The spermer at first simply lashes the water in indignation, but the lashing increases in fury until the sea becomes milky white. This was the condition of affairs between the fighters when the Mexican stopped within hailing distance of the fight. With subdued excitement the crew and passengers watched the proceedings.

A TERRIFIC ENCOUNTER.

Faster and faster became the lashings of the sperm whale, and louder echoed the strokes on the water. Several times the spermer, with a mighty effort, rose clean out of the sea, half dragging the jasper that had hold of his jaw, out of the water with him. He was out but for an instant, giving him, however, an opportunity to gain a breath of air sufficient to allow him to renew with greater energy the struggle for life. On went the combat It seemed as if some unseen power of nature was forming mighty eddies and whirlpools around these great occupants of the sea. Long was the fierce and unabated struggle. The last time that the sperm whale rose from the water, which must have been a herculean effort to accomplish, the whale bled profusely from the sides. Down again he went with a dash. A few more terrible lashes were dealt the water by his tail, and then there was a gradual diminishing of the strokes.

Fainter and slower became the struggle for life. All could see that the great leviathan, that had fought nobly and bravely to escape his deadly enemies, was now rapidly passing away. Death was near. From a milky white color the sea was fast turning into a blood-red hue. A few mighty gasps were made by the doomed fish and the ferocious sea battle was over. He lay on the surface of the Bay of Biscay, surrounded by his own blood, bereft of life after as gallant a fight as was ever made by man, brute or fish for the preservation of life.

So impressive had been the scene that it was some moments before any one moved from the position they had occupied for the past hour. The solemn silence was broken by the Captain ringing the engine-room bell, which signaled the boat to start on her voyage at full speed ahead. That ocean fight will live in the memory of those who saw it as long as life shall last.

NO PURE GOLD IN USE.

"Gold, when refined from impurities," says a well-known jeweller, "and alloys of inferior metals, is denominated pure. This means gold of twenty-four carats, and this is the standard recognized by the Mint master and dealers in gold. As a matter of fact, however, there is no gold so pure. Gold of twenty-two carats is about as pure as it can be got. It has two parts of silver or one part of silver and one part of copper. The copper darkens the color of gold, while silver lightens it in color. Twenty-three carat gold is occasionally seen, which means a half carat each of silver and of copper. Ordinarily eighteen carat gold is the best gold that can be had. Certainly it is the best for jewelry, for pure gold, as it is called, is too soft, and will wear away much faster than the owners of it desire."

MORE MYSTERIES NOW.

What a mystery is life! exclaimed the philosopher.

That, moreover, was long prior to the invention of the trolley car and those other perfectly killing things that characterize our age of progress.

MILITARY BALLOONS.

England is Spending $12,500 a Year on Experiments.

The School of Military Ballooning at Aldershot has become a noteworthy and important institution; although maintained by a grant of only £2500 a year, it stands second to none in its scientific achievements, says the London Standard. Originally founded by the Royal Engineers at Woolwich, about nineteen years ago, it was subsequently removed to Chatham, and thence to Aldershot under Maj., now Col., Templer, who has with him Capt. Jones, R.E., and Capt. Ward, R.E. To these officers are due the present state of efficacy of the establishment, and the perfection of the balloons, as well as the appliances for working them.

The first important step in the adaptation of the balloon for military purposes was the compression in steel tubes of the hydrogen for the inflation of the balloons on the field or the road. Gas works can not be reckoned upon on a line of march; nor can coal or raw materials be transported so handily or so cheaply as the tubes of compressed gas. The hydrogen required must be of the purest quality, made from zinc and sulphuric acid. Another improvement is the production of hydrogen by electrolysis. The trials are progressing satisfactorily, and the cleanliness and certainty of the dynamo will undoubtedly prevail over the chemical process. The compression of the gas has advanced most markedly in the direction of safety and security. In like manner, the steel containing tubes have been improved in material, and rendered safe under the very great stress of 101 atmospheres—at which stress they are required to travel over any and

EVERY SORT OF GROUND.

The experiences of many years have shown that tubes must be carefully cleansed before recharging, and very effective precautions are taken to this end. To carry the balloon charge of 11,000 cubic feet of gas in tubes three wagons are needed, with the existing dimensions and weights of the tubes; but when the new pattern tubes and wagons are delivered two wagons will suffice.

The adoption of "gold-beater skins" for the substance of the balloon is a step unequaled in importance. These skins have the property of adhering firmly together, so that they form a homogenous material remarkable for its toughness, as well as being absolutely impervious to the gas. So tough and strong is the material that a closed balloon of large size has ascended higher than 7000 feet without bursting. A large balloon of this substance, having 2500 square feet of surface and capable of containing 10,000 cubic feet of gas, weighs only 170 pounds. The top valve of the balloon is now made very light and strong, of an aluminum alloy, and is screwed into its bearing by a very fine thread. It fits perfectly gas tight. The silk and cloth balloons of former days were always in some sort of trouble. The fabric, being varnished, was readily subject to cracks. It often heated, and became more or less charred; it was tender and liable to be rent or torn. The gas was always leaking away, and the material was troublesome to repair after small holes and grazes.

We have next to follow the large finished balloon in its final stages of rigging and equipment. The cord for the netting has to be both very strong and very light. That used is of Italian hemp, and weighs 1 pound to the hank. A yard of it with a splicing, stretched round two pulleys will stand

500 POUNDS' STRAIN

without breaking. In this cord is woven a fine brass thread for the security of the balloon in thunder storms. The ring is of American hickory, and the car is formed of excellent wicker-work. The aeronaut or officer ascending with him makes up what observing instrument he likes or requires. Some of the hand records taken in the free balloon excursions are extremely precise and full of serviceable details. The photographs, even those of small size, usually contain details of value. Soldiers within a range of two miles on each side of the line of flight can be detected with a hand lens.

The coming trials of the capabilities of balloons for taking part in military engineering operations in warfare will be fraught with interest and novelty, whether they be successful or not. The first trials will probably be directed toward the application of captive and carrying balloons in assisting or preventing operations in trenches. The ditch forms the protection to the working sappers; and the artillery projectiles cut into the rear of the trench and drive the debris to the rear of the work. The object of a balloon attack, therefore, might be to plant, say, a 500-pound charge of high explosive in rear of the trench, so that when exploded it should blow the debris into it, overwhelming the men or exposing them to their enemy. Every balloon wagon has half a mile of wire rope attached to it, which is available for holding the balloon captive. There is also a telephone conductor; and connection with the wagon is neatly made on a screw bar, so that in whatever direction the pull of the balloon may be the wire rope will never come into contact across the drum. The wagons can be readily moved about, and the carrying balloon, with explosive charge, round in form, and swiveled on the end of a line pendant from it, could be manipulated by the experts in accordance with signals received from the captive or observing balloon; the explosive charge could thus be got into the place desired.

DISCONTINUED TAKING.

Irate Patron—You advertise to cure consumption, don't you?

Doctor Quack—Yes, sir. I never fail when my instructions are followed.

Irate Patron—My son took your medicine for a year, and died an hour after the last dose.

Doctor Quack—My instructions were not followed. I told him to take it two years.