AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER IX.

When Elizabeth-Jane opened the hinged casement next morning the mellow air brought in the feel of imminent autumn almost as distinctly as if she had been in the remotest hamlet. Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite. Bees and butterflies in the cornfields at the top of the town, who desired to get to the meads at the bottom, took no circuitous course, but flew straight down High Street without any apparent consciousness that they were traversing strange latitudes. And in autumn airy sphere of thistledown floated into the same street, lodged upon the shop-fronts, blew into drains; and innumerable tawny and yellow leaves skimmed along the pavement,and stole through people's doorways into their passages with a hesitating scratch on the floor, like the skirts of timid visitors.

Hearing voices, one of which was close at hand, she withdrew her head, and glanced from behind the window-curtains. Mr. Henchard—now habited no longer as a great personage, but as a thriving man of business—was pausing on his way up the middle of the street, and the Scotchman was looking from the window adjoining her own. Henchard, it appeared, had gone a little way past the inn before he had noticed his acquaintance of the previous evening. He came back a few steps, Donald Farfrae opening the window farther.

"And you are off soon, I suppose," said Henchard upwards.

"Yes—almost this moment, sir," said the other. "Maybe I'll walk on till the coach overtakes me."

"Which way?"

"The way ye are going."

"Then shall we walk together to the top o' town?"

"If ye'll wait a minute," said the Scotchman.

In a few minutes, the latter emerged, bag in hand, Henchard looked at the bag as at an enemy. It showed there was no mistake about the young man's departure.

"Ah, my lad," he said; "you should have been a wise man and have stayed with me."

"Yes—yes,—it might have been wiser," said Donald, looking microscopically at the houses that were farthest off. "It is only telling ye the truth when I say my plans are vague."

They had by this time passed on from the precincts of the inn, and Elizabeth-Jane heard no more. She saw that they continued in conversation, Henchard turning to the other occasionally, and emphasising some remark with a gesture. Thus they passed the Golden Crown Hotel, the Market House, the churchyard wall, ascending to the upper end of the long street till they were small as two grains of corn; when they bent suddenly to the right into the Bristol Road, and were out of view.

"He was a good man—and he's gone," she said to herself, "I was nothing to him, and there was no reason why he should have wished me good-bye."

The simple thought, with its latent sense of slight, had moulded itself out of the following little fact; when the Scotchman came out at the door he had by accident glanced up at her; and then he had looked away again without nodding, or smiling, or saying a word.

"You are still thinking, mother," she said when she turned inwards.

"Yes; I am thinking of Mr. Henchard's sudden liking for that young man. He was always so. Now surely if he takes so warmly to people who are not related to him at all, may he not take as warmly to his own kin?"

While they debated this question, a procession of five large waggons went past, laden with hay up to the bedroom windows. They came in from the country, and the steaming horses had probably been travelling a great part of the night. To the shaft of each hung a little board on which was painted in white letters, "Henchard, corn-factor and hay-merchant." The spectacle renewed his wife's conviction that, for her daughter's sake, she should strain a point to rejoin him.

The discussion was continued during breakfast, and the end of it was that Mrs. Henchard decided, for good or for ill, to send Elizabeth-Jane with a message to Henchard, to the effect that his relative Susan, a sailor's widow, was in the town; leaving it to him to say whether or not he would recognize her. What had brought her to this determination were chiefly two things. He had been described as a lonely widower; and he had expressed shame for a past transaction of his life. There was promise in both.

"If he says no," she enjoined, as Elizabeth-Jane stood, bonnet on, ready to depart; "If he thinks it does not become the good position he has reached to in the town, to own—to let us call on him as—his distant kinsfolk, say, "Then, sir, we would rather not intrude; we will leave Casterbridge as quietly as we have come, and go back to our own country." . . . I almost feel that I would rather he did say so, as I have not seen him for so many years, and we are so—little allied to him!"

"And if he says yes?" inquired the more sanguine one.

"In that case," answered Mrs. Henchard cautiously, "ask him to write me a note, saying when and how he will see us—or me."

Elizabeth-Jane went a few steps towards the landing. "And tell him," continued her mother, "that I fully know I have no claim upon him—that I am glad to find he is thriving; that I hope his life may be long and happy—there, go." Thus with a half-hearted willingness, a smothered reluctance, did the poor forgiving woman start her unconscious daughter on this errand.

It was about ten o'clock, and market-day, when Elizabeth paced up the High Street, in no great hurry; for to herself her position was only that of a poor relation deputed to hunt up a rich one. The front doors of the private houses were mostly left open at this warm autumn time, no thought of umbrella stealers, disturbing the minds of the placid burgesses. Hence, through the long, straight entrance passages thus unclosed could be seen, as through tunnels, the mossy gardens at the back, glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums, "bloody warriors," snap-dragons, and dahlias, this floral blaze being backed by crusted gray stonework, remaining from a yet remoter Casterbridge than the venerable one visible in the street. The old-fashioned fronts of these houses, which had older than old-fashioned backs, rose sheer from the pavement, into which the bow-windows protruded like bastions, necessitating a pleasing chassez-dechassez movement to the time-pressed pedestrian at every few yards. He was bound also to evolve other Terpsichorean figures in respect of door-steps, scrapers, cellar-hatchets, church buttresses, and the overhanging angles of walls which, originally unobtrusive, had become bow-legged and knock-kneed.

In addition to these fixed obstacles which spoke so cheerfully of individual unrestraint as to boundaries, movables occupied the path and roadway to a perplexing extent. First the vans of the carriers in and out of Casterbridge, who hailed from Mellstock, Weatherbury, Hintock, Sherton-Abbas, Stickleford, Overcombe, and many other villages round. Their owners were numerous enough to be regarded as a tribe, and had almost distinctiveness enough to be regarded as a race. Their vans had just arrived, and were drawn up on each side of the street in close file, so as to form at places a wall between the pavement and the roadway. Next every shop pitched out half its contents upon trestles and boxes on the kerb, extending the display each week a little farther and farther into the roadway, despite the expostulations of the two feeble old constables, until there remained but a tortuous defile for carriages down the centre of the street, which afforded fine opportunities for showing skill with the reins. Over the pavement on the sunny side of the way hung shop-blinds, so constructed as to give the passenger's hat a smart buffet off his head as from the unseen hands of Cranstoun's Goblin Page, celebrated in romantic lore.

Horses for sale were tied in rows,their fore-legs on the pavement, their hind-legs in the street, in which position they occasionally nipped little boys by the shoulder who were passing to school. And any inviting recess in front of a house that had been modestly kept back from the general line was utilised by pig-dealers as a pen for their stock. The yeomen, farmers, dairymen and townsfolk, who came to transact business in these ancient streets,spoke in other ways than by articulation. Not to hear the words of your interlocutor in metropolitan centres is to know nothing of his meaning. Here the face, the arms, the hat, the stick, the body throughout spoke equally with the tongue. To express satisfaction the Casterbridge market-man added to his utterance a broadening of the cheeks, a crevicing of the eyes, a throwing back of the shoulders, which was intelligible from the other end of the street. If he wondered, though all Henchard's carts and waggons were rattling past him, you knew it from perceiving the inside of his crimson mouth, and a target-like circling of his eyes. Deliberation caused sundry attacks on the moss of adjoining walls with the end of his stick, a change of his hat from the horizontal to the less so; a sense of tediousness announced itself in a lowering of the person by spreading the knees to a lozenge-shaped aperture, and contorting the arms. Chicanery, subterfuge, had hardly a place in the streets of this honest borough to all appearance; and it was said that the lawyers in the Court House hard by occasionally threw in strong arguments for the other side out of pure generosity (though apparently by mischance) when advancing their own.

Thus Casterbridge was in most respects but the pole, focus, or nerve-knot of the surrounding country-life; differing from the many manufacturing towns which are as foreign bodies set down, like boulders on a plain, in a green world with which they have nothing in common. Casterbridge lived by agriculture at one remove farther from the fountain-head than the adjoining villagers—no more. The townsfolk understood every fluctuation in the rustic's condition, for it affected their receipts as much as the labourer's; they entered into the troubles and joys which moved the aristocratic families ten miles round—for the same reason. And even at the dinner-parties of the professional families the subjects of discussion were corn, cattle-disease, sowing and reaping, fencing and planting; while politics were viewed by them less from their own standpoint of burgesses with rights and privileges than from the standpoint of their county neighbours.

All the venerable contrivances and confusions which delighted the eye by their quaintness, and in a measure reasonableness, in this rare old market-town, were metropolitan novelties to the unpractised eyes of Elizabeth-Jane, fresh from netting fish-seines in a sea-side cottage. Very little inquiry was necessary to guide her footsteps. Henchard's house was one of the best, fronted with murrey-coloured old brick. The front door was open, and, as in other houes, she could see through the passage to the end of the garden—nearly a quarter of a mile off.

Mr. Henchard was not in the house, but in the storeyard. She was conducted into the mossy garden, and through a side-door in the wall which was studded with rusty nails, speaking of generations of fruit-trees that had been trained there. The door opened upon the yard, and here she was left to find him as she could. It was a place flanked by hay-barns, into which tons of fodder, all in trusses, were being packed from the waggons she had seen pass the inn that morning. On other sides of the yard were wooden granaries on stone staddles, to which access was given by Flemish ladders, and a storehouse several floors high. Wherever the doors of these places were open, a closely packed throng of bursting wheat-sacks could be seen standing, with the air of awaiting a famine that would not come.

She wandered about this place, uncomfortably conscious of the impending interview, till she was quite weary of searching; she ventured to inquire of a boy in what quarter of the labyrinth Mr. Henchard could be found. He directed her to an office which she had not seen before, and knocking at the door she was answered by a cry of "Come in."

Elizabeth turned the handle; and there stood before her, bending over some sample-bags on a table, not the corn-merchant, but the young Scotchman, Mr. Farfrae—in the act of pouring some grains of wheat from one hand to the other. His hat hung on a peg behind him, and the roses of his carpet-bag glowed from the corner of the room.

Having toned her feelings and arranged words on her lip for Mr. Henchard, and for him alone, she was for the moment confounded.

"Yes what is it?" said the Scotchman, like a man who permanently ruled there.

She said she wanted to see Mr. Henchard.

"Ah yes; will ye wait a minute? He's engaged just now," said the young man, apparently not recognising her as the girl at the inn. He handed her a chair, bade her sit down, and turned to his sample-bags again. While Elizabeth-Jane sits waiting in great amaze at the young man's presence, we may briefly explain how he came there.

When the two new acquaintances had passed out of sight that morning towards the Bath-and-Bristol road they went on silently, except for a few commonplaces, till they had gone down an avenue on the town walls called the New Walk, leading to an angle where the North and West escarpments met. From this high corner of the square earthworks a vast extent of country could be seen. A footpath ran steeply down the green slope, conducting from the shady promenade on the walls to a road at the bottom of the scarp. It was by this path the Scotchman had to descend.

"Well, here's success to ye," said Henchard, holding out his right hand and leaning with his left upon the wicket which protected the descent. In the act there was the inelegance of one whose feelings are nipped and wishes defeated. "I shall often think of this time and of how you came at the very moment to throw a light upon my difficulty."

Still holding the young man's hand he paused, and then added deliberately: "Now I am not the man to let a cause be lost for want of a word. And before ye are gone for ever I'll speak. Once more will ye stay? There it is, flat and plain, you can see that it isn't all selfishness that makes me press 'ee; for my business is not quite so scientific as to require an intellect entirely out of the common. Others would do for the place without doubt. Some selfishness perhaps there is, but there is more; it isn't vor me to repeat what. Come, bide with me and name your own terms. I'll agree to 'em willingly and without a word of gainsaying; for, hang it, Farfrae, I like thee well!"

The young man's hand remained steady in Henchard's for a moment or two. He looked over the fertile country that stretched beneath them, then backward along the shaded walk reaching to the top of the town. His face flushed.

"I didn't expect such as this—I did not!" he said. "Surely there's destiny in it! Should a man turrun against fate? No; I'll not go to America; I'll stay and be your man!"

His hand, which had lain lifeless in Henchard's returned the latter's grasp.

"Done," said Henchard.

"Done," said Donald Farfrae.

The face of Mr. Henchard beamed forth a satisfaction that was almost fierce in its strength. "Now you are my friend!" he exclaimed. "Come back to my house; let's clinch it at once by clear terms, so as to be comfortable in our minds." Frefrae caught up his bag and retraced the North-West Avenue in Henchard's company as he had come. Henchard was all confidence now.

"I am the most distant fellow in the world when I don't care for a man," he said. "But when a man takes my fancy he takes it strong. Now I am sure you can eat another breakfast. You couldn't have eaten much so early even if they had anything at that place to gie thee, which they hadn't; so come to my house and we will have a solid, staunch tuck-in, and settle terms in black-and-white if you like; though my word's my bond. I can always make a good meal in the morning. I've got a splendid cold pigeon-pie going just now. You can have some home-brew if you want to, you know."

"It is too early in the morning for that," said Farfrae with a smile.

"Well, of course I didn't know. I don't drink it because of my oath; but I am obliged to brew for my work-people."

Thus talking they returned, and entered Henchard's premises by the back way or traffic-entrance. Here the matter was settled over the breakfast, at which Henchard heaped the young Scotchman's plate to a prodigal fulness. He would not rest satisfied till Farfrae had written for his luggage from Bristol, and despatched the letter to the post-office. When it was done this man of strong impulses declared that this new friend should take up his abode in his house—at least till some suitable lodgings could be found.

He then took Farfrae round and showed him the place, and the stores of grain, and other stock; and finally entered the offices, where the younger of them had already been discovered by Elizabeth.

CHAPTER X.

While she still sat under the Scotchman's eyes a man came up to the door, reaching it as Henchard opened the door of the inner office to admit Elizabeth. The new-comer stepped forward like the quicker cripple at Bethesda, and entered in her stead. She could hear his words to Henchard! "Joshua Jopp, sir—by appointment—the new manager."

"The new manager!—he's in his office," said Henchard bluntly.

"In his office!" said the man with a stultified air.

"I mentioned Thursday," said Henchard; "and as you did not keep your appointment, I have engaged another manager. At first I thought he must be you. Do you think I can wait when business is in question?"

"You said Thursday or Saturday, sir," said the new-comer, pulling out a letter.

"Well, you are too late," said the corn-factor. "I can say no more."

"You as good as engaged me," murmured the man.

"Subject to an interview," said Henchard. "I am sorry for you—very sorry indeed. But it can't be helped."

There was no more to be said, and the man came out, encountering Elizabeth-Jane in his passage. She could see that his mouth twitched with anger, and that bitter disappointment was written in his face everywhere.

Elizabeth-Jane now entered, and stood before the master of the premises. His dark pupils—which always seemed to have a red spark of light in them, though this could hardly be a physical fact— turned indifferently round under his dark brows, until they rested on her figure. "Now then, what is it, my young woman?" he said blandly.

"Can I speak to you—not on business, sir?" said she.

"Yes—I suppose." He looked at her more thoughtfully.

"I am sent to tell you, sir," she innocently went on, "that a distant relative of yours by marriage, Susan Newson, a sailor's widow, is in the town; and to ask whether you would wish to see her."

The rich rouge-et-noir of his countenance underwent a slight change. "Oh—Susan is—still alive?" he asked with difficulty.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you her daughter?"

"Yes sir—her only daughter."

"What—do you call yourself—your Christian name?"

"Elizabeth-Jane, sir."

"Newson?"

"Elizabeth-Jane Newson."

This at once suggested to Henchard that the transaction of his early married life at Weydon Fair was unrecorded in the family history. It was more than he could have expected. His wife had behaved kindly to him in return for his unkindness, and had never proclaimed her wrong to her child or to the world.

"I am—a good deal interested in your news," he said. "And as this is not a matter of business, but pleasure suppose we go indoors."

(To Be Continued.)

AN INCOMPETENT WITNESS.

At this point the big and fierce-looking justice of the peace took a hand in the examination as he glowered at the main witness:

"Had you ever saw this prisoner before you seen him stealing their harness?

"Not that I knows on."

fore you seen him stealing them harnesses as the one he took from your barn?"

"Them's my harness."

"Do you stand up here on your solemn oath and say they hain't no other setter harness like them in the country?"

"I got my marks on them harness, and could tell 'em if they was in Novey Scoshey."

"Would you have knowed them if you wasn't here when the constable brung them into the presence of the court?"

"I tell you I would have knowed them anywhere."

"You what?"

"I would have knowed 'em anywhere."

"Gentlemen of the jury," roared the justice, "I want to call your attention to this here witnesses' grammar. Instead of saying 'he would have known,' he says 'he would have knowed.' You notice he can't talk correct no more than nuthin'. I won't have no man convicted in this here court on testimony what hain't correct. The prisoner at the bar is acquitted on the conditions of leavin' other folks' harnesses and likewise also other chattels alone."

WILL SHE BE A BRIDESMAID?

They met on the street corner.

"Why, Maude," said the girl in the green dress, "I was just on my way to see you." And she giggled with merriment.

"Yes, it is a long time since you called and I have lots to tell you."

"But it wasn't only to make a call that I was going to see you. You see," and she giggled again, "I am going to be married and I want you to be my bridesmaid."

"Oh, that is lovely. I shall be so glad. And what are the bridesmaids going to wear, and what will you wear, dear? I hope you will wear pink. You look so well in that."

"I am going to wear pink and the bridesmaids will wear white. You look lovely in white."

"Who are going to be the bridesmaids?"

"There's Jenny, Marie, Gladys, Ethel, Edna and Adeline."

"All of them?"

"Yes. But you haven't asked me who I am going to marry."

"Oh, yes, tell me, But here comes that horrid Mr. Lane. He always wants to stop and speak to people and puts himself generally in the way. He's smiling at us now. Let's get out of the way and have a long talk about it."

"Mr. Lane! Why, yes, it is he. That, dear, is the man I am going to marry."

She walked off with Mr. Lane, and now Maude is wondering whether she will be a bridesmaid.

ONE OF THE OLD MASTERS.

A friend of mine was playing a selection from Spohr one day in her apartments, when the landlady entering, said:

Ah! that reminds me of my dear son who used to play the piano.

Why? asked my friend. What did he play?

Oh, summat from the great masters, she returned; I forget the name.

Was it from Spohr? questioned my friend.

No, it warn't Spohr, and it warn't Spout.

Was it Handel? asked my friend.

Ah, yes! cried the old lady, brightening up. I knew it was something to do with a jug.

THE WAY SHE DOES IT.

Mabel—Why has Miss Elderly taken up music?

Clara—Because she wants to beat time.

FATE IN A TEACUP.

How You May Tell Your Fortune, If You Are Superstitious.

Of all the methods of an elder day art which are in survival, fortune telling by tea grounds may be said to dbe the oldest method known and the one believed to be the truest. Our grandmothers had many superstitions connected with the turning of the cup, superstitions which are now a part of to-day's creed.

In the first place we must drink a little of the tea, which should be hot, and then turn out the rest, being careful not to turn out the grounds at the same time, and also being careful not to look at them, as this is considered to bring ill-luck. Having turned the tea all off, turn the cup completely over, in order that not a drop of water remains, for this would mean tears. Then having turned the cup slowly around toward you three times, at the same time wishing the wish of your heart, set the cup down a moment, resting it against the edge of the saucer or any convenient plate. It is very necessary that the cup should rest in this manner a moment, as putting it flat down upon the table would be a tempting of ill-fortune, according to tea grounds tenets. Another means of courting ill-luck is to interfere with anyone else's fortune by presenting your cup while the other is being read. Only one person's cup at a time must be read.

According to all authorities, three small dots in a perpendicular row always stand for the wish, and the nearer they are to the top of the cup, the quicker the wish will be obtained. Three small dots that form a triangle mean unlooked for good luck in the fulfilment of the wish. A triangle is always a fortunate sign. So also is an anchor, a horseshoe, a cross, and a flag. A flag means that something of unusual advantage to the person is about to occur, or some unexpected good news. Where the grounds are well bunched together and it is clear all about them, it promises that everything will go well with the seeker after the future. If, on the contrary the grounds are scattered about confusedly there will be much confusion over some event or something disastrous will happen to the fortune seeker. The grounds surrounded by fine, dust-like particles signifies trouble, and drops of water in the cup stand for tears. The same fine, dust-like grounds bunched together at the bottom or side of the cup is a sum of money. A small ring in the midst of the regular grounds means an invitation.

A large, very round ring, perfectly closed means an offer of marriage to a single woman, some fortunate undertaking to a married woman, and a business offer to a man. Should the ring enclose a number of small specks, it means an offer of marriage from a wealthy man, or a business transaction in which money is concerned. A very large opening stands for a body of water, and a broken ring signifies a disappointment. The straight stick-like grounds are supposedly people, light or dark, according to their colour, and short or tall according to their length. A very small stick means a child. To have the stick or person in a horizontal position is sure to mean illness, and should the larger end of the stick, which is supposed to be the head, lie lower than the other end it signifies death. The tea grounds often form in semblance of a person, generally standing for the person whose fortune is being read, especially if found on the right side of the cup. Should the grounds bank up in two distinct places the person is about to make a change to another place, large or small as the banking may indicate. A long trailing line of very fine grounds foretells a journey, and if connected with a large opening of the grounds, a journey by water. A boat also foretells travelling by water. A fish is said to bring good luck in business and it is also supposed to be a suitor in marriage. A small speck near the top of the cup means a letter, larger ones standing for a package, or trunk if with a person. Look out for the person with a small bunch of grounds at his back. He is coming to you with a lot of gossip or will talk about you. A bird flying upward in a cup signifies a pleasant letter, but if flying toward the bottom it is the bearer of unpleasant news. A horse running is hasty and important news. A horse is always a friend; so also is a dog. In fact, most every animal signifies good luck: A rooster crowing is great success of some kind. A turtle signifies long life or exceptionally good health. An eagle is a friend in need. A dangerous enemy is a snake, especially if it appears at the top of the cup. If it is in the bottom of the cup, supposedly under foot, it can do no harm, but warns one to be on his guard.

MIRRORS IN GLOVES.

A mirror in the palm of the glove is the latest novelty. With its assistance its owner is enabled to be sure that her bonnet is on straight, and also that her curls are in perfect order. She can likewise ascertain if her bow is at the most becoming angle at the proper time.

All these things and a hundred others, important from the feminine point of view, she can find out on the street without attracting the attention of passersby, with the aid of this simple contrivance.

The inventor of this device has so arranged the little looking-glass in the palm of the glove as not to interfere with the shutting of the hand. He has likewise taken the precaution of putting it in the left-hand glove, so that when its owner shakes hands with a friend it will not be observed.

It is not the fair sex alone that will find this ingenious contrivance useful. Men are quite as vain as women, so the latter claim, and it will be seen by any observer to look at themselves in every mirror they pass on the streets.