# AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER XII.

On entering his own door, after watching his wife out of sight, the Mayor walked on through the tunnel-shaped passage into the garden, and thence by the side door towards the stores and granaries. A light shone from the office-window, and there being no blind to screen the interior, Henchard could see Donald Farfrae still seated where he left him, initiating himself into the managerial work of the house by overhauling the books. Henchard entered merely observing, "Don't let me interrupt you, if ye will stay so late."

He stood behind Farfrae's chair, watching his dexterity in clearing up the numerical fogs which had been allowed to grow so thick in Henchard's books as almost to baffle even the Scotchman's perspicacity. The corn-factor's mien, was half admiring, and yet it was not without a dash of pity for the tastes of any one who could care to give his mind to such finikin details. Henchard himself was mentally and physically unfit for grubbing subtleties from soiled paper; he had in a modern sense received the education of Achilles, and found penmanship a tantalising art.

"You shall do no more to-night," he said at length, spreading his great hand over the paper. "There's time enough to-morrow. Come indoors with me and have some supper. Now you shall! I am determined on't." He shut the account-books with friendly force.

Donald had wished to get to his lodgings; but he already saw that his friend and employer was a man who knew no moderation in his requests and impulses, and he yielded gracefully. He liked Henchard's warmth, even if it inconvenienced him; the great difference in their characters adding to the liking.

They locked up the office, and the young man followed his companion through the private little door, which, admitting directly into Henchard's garden, permitted a passage from the utilitarian to the beautiful at one step. The garden was silent, dewy, and full of perfume. It extended a long way back from the house, first as lawn and flower-beds, then as fruit-garden, where the long-tied espaliers, as old as the old house itself, had grown so stout and cramped and gnarled that they had pulled their stakes out of the ground, and stood distorted and writhing in vegetable agony, like leafy Laocoons. The flowers which smelt so sweetly were not discernible; and they passed through them into the house.

The hospitalities of the morning were repeated, and when they were over Henchard said, "Pull your chair round to the fireplace, my dear fellow, and let's make a blaze—there's nothing I hate like a black grate, even in September." He applied a light to the laid-in fuel and a cheerful radiance spread around.

"It is odd," said Henchard, "that two men should meet as we have done on a purely business ground, and that at the end of the first day I should wish to speak to 'ee on a family matter. But, d—— it all, I am a lonely man, Farfrae: I have nobody else to speak to; and why shouldn't I tell it to you?"

"I'll be glad to hear it, if I can be of any service," said Donald, allowing his eyes to travel over the intricate wood-carvings of the chimney-piece, representing garlanded lyres, shields, and quivers; on either side of a draped ox-skull, and flanked by heads of Apollo and Diana in low relief.

"I've not been always what I am now," continued Henchard, his firm deep voice being ever so little shaken. He was plainly under that strange influence which sometimes prompts men to confide to the new-found friend what they will not tell to the old. "I began life as a working hay-trusser, and when I was eighteen I married on the strength o' my calling. Would you think me a married man?"

"I heard in the town that you were a widower."

"Ah, yes—you would naturally have heard that. Well, I lost my wife eighteen years ago—by my own fault. . . This is how it came about. One summer evening I was travelling for employment, and she was walking at my side, carrying the baby, our only child. We came to a booth in a country fair. I was a drinking man at that time."

Henchard paused a moment, threw himself back so that his elbow rested on the table, his forehead being shaded by his hand, which, however, did not hide the marks of introspective inflexibility on his features as he narrated in fullest detail the incidents of the transaction with the sailor. The tinge of indifference which had at first been visible in the Scotchman now disappeared.

Henchard went on to describe his attempts to find his wife; the oath he swore; the solitary life he led during the years which followed. "I have kept my oath for eighteen years," he went on; "I have risen to what you see me now."

"And it's not a small counterbalance to the immoral years that ye've done so much since!"

"Well—no wife could I hear of in all that time; and being by nature something of a woman-hater, I have found it no hardship to keep at a distance from the sex. No wife could I hear of, I say, till this very day. And now—she has come back."

"Come back, has she?"

"This morning—this very morning. And what's to be done?"

"Can't ye take her and live with her, and so make amends?"

"That's what I have planned and proposed. But Farfrae," said Henchard gloomily, "by doing right with Susan I wrong another innocent woman."

"Ye don't say that?"

"In the nature of things, Farfrae, it is almost impossible that a man of my sorts should have the good fortune to tide through twenty years o' life without making more blunders than one. It has been my custom for many years to run across to Jersey in the way of business, particularly in the potato and root season. I do a large trade wi' them in that line. Well, one autumn when stopping there I fell quite ill, and in my illness I sank into one of those gloomy fits I sometimes suffer from, on account o' the loneliness of my domestic life, when the world seems to have the blackness of hell, and, like Job, I could curse the day that gave me birth."

"Ah, now, I never feel like it," said Farfrae.

"Then pray to God that you never may, young man. While in this state I was taken pity on by a woman—a young lady I should call her, for she was of good family, well bred, and well educated—the daughter of some harum scarum military officer who had got into difficulties, and had his pay sequestrated. He was dead now, and her mother, too, and she was as lonely as I. This young creature was staying at the boarding-house where I happened to have my lodgings; and when I was pulled down she took upon herself to nurse me. From that she got to have a foolish liking for me. Heaven knows why, for I didn't encourage any such thing. But, being together in the same house, and her feelings warm, there arose a terrible scandal, which did me no harm, but was of course ruin to her. Though, Farfrae, between you and me, as man and man, I solemnly declare that I did her no wrong. Devotion to women-folk has neither been my vice nor my virtue. But I am bound to admit that she was terribly careless of appearances, and that I was perhaps more, because o' my dreary state; and it was through this that the scandal arose. At last I was well, and came away. When I was gone she suffered much on my account, and didn't forget to tell me so in letters one after another; till, latterly, I felt I owed her something, and thought that, as I had not heard of Susan for so long, I would make this other one the only return I could make, and ask her if she would run the risk of Susan being alive (very slight as I believed) and marry me, such as I was. She jumped for joy, and we should no doubt soon have been married—but, behold, Susan appears!"

Donald showed his deep concern at a complication so far beyond the degree of his simple experiences.

"Now see what injury a man may cause around him. Even after that wrong-doing at the fair when I was young, if I had never been so selfish as to let this giddy girl devote herself to me over at Jersey, to the injury of her name, all might now be well. Yet as it stands, I must bitterly disappoint one of these women; and it is the second. My first duty is to Susan—ther's no doubt about that."

"They are both in a very melancholy position, and that's true!" murmured Donald.

"They are! For myself I don't care—'twill all end one way. But these two." Henchard paused in reverie. "I feel I should like to treat the second, no less than the first, as kindly as a man can in such a case."

"Ah, well, it cannot be helped!" said the other, with philosophic woefulness. "You must write to the young lady, and in your letter you must put it plain and honest that it turns out she cannot be your wife, the first having come back; that ye cannot see her more; and that—ye wish her weel."

"That won't do. 'Od seize it, I must do a little more than that. I must—though she did always brag about her rich uncle or rich aunt, and her expectations from 'em—I must send a useful sum of money to her, I suppose—just as a little recompense—poor girl. . . Now, will you help me in this and draw up an explanation to her of all I've told ye, breaking it as gently as you can? I'm so bad at letters."

"And I will."

"Now, I haven't told you quite all yet. My wife Susan has my daughter with her—the baby that was in her arms at the fair; and this girl knows nothing of me beyond that I am some sort of relation by marriage. She has grown up in the belief that the sailor to whom I made over her mother, and who is now dead, was her father and her mother's husband. What her mother has always felt, she and I together feel now—that we can't proclaim our disgrace to the girl by letting her know the truth. Now what would you do—I want your advice?"

"I think I'd run the risk, and tell her the truth. She'll forgive ye both."

"Never!" said Henchard. "I am not going to let her know the truth. Her mother and I are going to marry again; and it will not only enable us to retain our child's respect, but it will be more proper. Susan looks upon herself as the sailor's widow, and won't think of living with me as formerly without another religious ceremony—and she's right."

Farfrae thereupon said no more. The letter to the young Jersey woman was carefully framed by him, and the interveiw ended, Henchard saying, as the Scotchman left: "I feel it a great relief, Farfrae, to tell some friend of this! You see now that the Mayor of Casterbridge is not so thriving in his mind as it seems he might be from the state of his pocket."

"I do. And I am sorry for it!" said Farfrae.

When he was gone Henchard copied the letter, and, enclosing a cheque, took it to the post-office, from which he walked back thoughtfully.

"Can it be that it will go off so easily!" he said. "Poor thing— God knows! Now then, to make amends to Susan!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The cottage which Michael Henchard hired for his wife Susan, under her name of Newson—in pursuance of their plan—was in the upper or western part of the town, near the wall, and the avenue which overshadowed it. The evening sun seemed to shine more yellowly there than anywhere else this autumn—stretching its rays, as the hours grew later, under the lowest sycamore boughs, and steeping the ground-floor of the dwelling, with its green shutters, in a substratum of radiance which the foliage screened from the upper parts. Beneath these sycamores on the town walls could be seen from the sitting-room the tumuli and earth forts of the distant uplands; making it altogether a pleasant spot with the usual touch of melancholy that a western prospect lends.

As soon as the mother and daughter were comfortably installed, with a white-aproned servant and all complete, Henchard paid them a visit, and remained to tea. During the entertainment Elizabeth was carefully hoodwinked by a very general tone of the conversations that prevailed—a proceeding which seemed to afford some humour to Henchard, though his wife was not particularly happy in it. The visit was repeated again and again with business-like determination by the Mayor, who seemed to have schooled himself into a course of strict mechanical rightness towards this woman of prior claim, at any expense to the latter one, and to his own sentiments.

One afternoon the daughter was not indoors when Henchard came, and he said dryly, "This is a very good opportunity for me to ask you to name the happy day, Susan."

The poor woman smiled faintly; she did not enjoy pleasantries on a situation into which she had entered solely for the sake of her girl's reputation. She liked them so little, indeed, that there was room for wonder why she had countenanced deception at all, and had not bravely let the girl know her history. But the flesh is weak; and the true explanation came in due course.

"Oh Michael," she said, "I am afraid all this is taking up your time and giving trouble—when I did not expect any such thing!" And she looked at him and at his dress as a man of affluence, and at the furniture he had provided for the room—ornate and lavish to her eyes.

"Not at all," said Henchard in rough benignity. "This is only a cottage—it costs me next to nothing. And as to taking up my time"—her his red and black visage kindled with satisfaction—"I've a splendid fellow to superintend my business now—a man whose like I've never been able to lay hands on before. I shall soon be able to leave everything to him, and have more time to call my own than I've had for these last twenty years."

Henchard's visits here grew so frequent and so regular that it soon became whispered, and openly discussed in Casterbridge, that the masterful, coercive Mayor of the town was captured and enervated by the genteel widow, Mrs. Newson. His well-known haughty indifference to the society of woman-kind, his silent avoidance of converse with the sex, contributed a piquancy to what would otherwise have been an unromantic matter enough. That such a poor fragile woman should be his choice was inexplicable, except on the ground that the engagement was a family affair, in which sentimental passion had no place; for it was known that they were related in some way. Mrs. Henchard was so pale that the boys called her "The Ghost." Sometimes Henchard overheard this epithet when they passed together along the Walks—as the avenues on the walls were named—at which his face would darken with an expression of destructiveness towards the speakers ominous to see; but he said nothing.

He pressed on the preparations for his union, or rather his reunion, with this pale creature in a dogged unflinching spirit which did credit to his conscientiousness. Nobody would have conceived from his outward demeanour to the bustle going on in his gaunt, great house; nothing but three large resolves; one to make amends to his neglected Susan, another to provide a comfortable home for Elizabeth-Jane under his paternal eye; and a third to castigate himself with the thorns which these restitutory acts brought in their train; among them the low-pulse of romance acting as stimulant ering of his dignity in public opinion by marrying so comparatively humble a woman.

Susan Henchard entered a carriage for the first time in her life when she stepped into the plain brougham, which drew up at the door on the wedding-day to take her and Elizabeth-Jane to church. It was a windless morning of warm November rain, which floated down like meal, and lay in a powdery form on the nap of hats and coats. Few people had gathered round the church door, though they were well packed within. The Scotchman, who assisted as groomsman, was of course, the only one present, beyond the chief actors, who knew the true situation of the contracting parties. He, however, was too inexperienced, too thoughtful, too judicial, too strongly conscious of the serious side of the business, to enter into the scene in its dramatic aspect. That inquired the special genius of Christopher Coney, Solomon Longways, Buzzford, and their fellows. But they knew nothing of the secret; though as the time for coming out of church drew on, they gathered on the pavement adjoining, and expounded the subject according to their lights.

"'Tis five-and-forty years since I had my settlement in this here town," said Coney; "but daze me if ever I see a man wait so long before to take so little! There's a chance even for thee after this, Nance Mockridge." The remark was addressed to a woman who stood behind his shoulder— the same who had exhibited Henchard's bad bread in public when Elizabeth and her mother entered Casterbridge.

"Be cust if I'd marry any such as he, or thee, either," replied that lady. "As for thee, Christopher, we know what ye be, and the less said the better. And as for he—well, there—(lowering her voice) 'tis said 'a was a poor 'prentice—I wouldn't say it for all the world—but 'a was a poor parish 'prentice, that began life wi' no more belonging to 'en than a carrion crow."

"And now he's worth ever so much a minute," murmured Longways. "When a man is said to be worth so and so a minute he's a man to be considered!"

Turning he saw a circular disc reticulated with creases, and recognised the smiling countenance of the fat woman who had asked for another song at the King of Prussia. "Well, Mother Cuxsom," he said, "how's this? Here's Mrs. Newson, a mere skellinton, has got another husband to keep her, while a woman of your tonnage have not."

"I have not. Nor another to beat me. . . Ah, yes, Cuxsom's gone, and so shall leather breeches!"

"Yes; with the blessing of God leather breeches shall go."

"'Tisn't worth my old while to think of another husband," continued Mrs. Cuxsom. "And yet I'll lay my life I'm as respectable born as she."

"True; your mother was a very good woman—I can mind her. She were rewarded by the Agricultural Society for having the greatest number of healthy children without parish assistance, and other virtuous marvels."

"Twas that that kept us so low upon ground—that great family."

"Ay. Where the pigs be many the wash runs thin."

"And dostn't mind how mother would sing, Christopher?" continued Mrs. Cuxsom, kindling at the retrospection: "and how we went with her to the party at Mellstock, do ye mind;—at old Dame Ledlow's, farmer Penny's sister, do ye mind?— she we used to call Toadskin, because her face were so yeller and freckled, do ye mind?"

"I do, hee-hee, I do!" said Christopher Coney.

"And well do I—for I was geting up husband-high at that time—one-half girl, and t'other half woman, as one may say. And canst mind"—she prodded Solomon's shoulder with her finger-tip, while her eyes twinkled between the crevices of their lids—"canst mind the sherry wine, and the silver snuffers, and how Joan Dummett was took bad when we were coming home, and Jack Griggs was forced to carry her through the mud; and how 'a let her fall in Dairyman Sweetapple's cow-barton, and we had to clane her gown wi' grass—never such a mess as a' were in?"

"Ay—that I do—hee-hee— such doggery as there was in them ancient days to be sure! Ah, the miles I used to walk then; and now I can hardly step over a furrow!"

Their reminiscences were cut short by the appearance of the reunited pair—Henchard looking round upon the idlers with that ambiguous gaze of his, which at one moment seemed to mean satisfaction, and at another fiery disdain.

"Well—there's a difference between 'em, though he do call himself a teetotaller," said Nance Mockridge. "She'll wish her cake dough afore she's done 'en; and 'twill out in time."

"Stuff—he's well enough. Some folk want their luck buttered. If I had a choice as wide as the ocean sea I wouldn't wish for a better man. A poor twanking woman like her—'tis a godsend for her, and hardly a pair of jumps to her name."

The plain little brougham drove off in the mist, and the idlers dispersed. "Well, we hardly know how to look at things in these times!" said Solomon. "There was a man dropped down dead yesterday, not so very many miles from here; and what wi' that, and this moist weather, 'tis scarce worth one's while to begin any work of consequence to-day. I'm in such a low key with drinking nothing but small table ninepenny this last week or two that I shall call and warm up at the Prooshia as I pass along."

"I don't know but that I may as well go with 'ee, Solomon," said Christopher; "I'm as clammy as a cockle-snail."

(To be continued).

## JAPAN TEN YEARS HENCE.

**Her Provisions for Strengthening Her Army and Her Fleet.**

Neither the military nor the naval forces of Japan can yet be called very formidable, judged from a Western standpoint. They are remarkable for an Asiatic nation, but relatively to the population are certainly not excessive. Japan called into action men enough for her war with China, and easily brought that huge, lumbering power to its knees; but the regular troops that she maintains in her establishment are not very numerous. A late statement puts the aggregate in officers and men at 73,941.

But the new programme, which has received legislative sanction, for an increase of these forces until the total becomes nearly double, making the standing army in 1906 not less than 144,000 strong. That force, which the reserves could swell to perhaps half a million or more, will be sufficient for her, with her comparatively isolated position and the capabilities of her coasts for defence. And yet how little burden will be imposed on her treasury is clear from the estimate that the annual cost of maintaining this great establishment will be not over $14,000,000.

As with the British Isles, however, whose geographical position relative to the adjoining Continent Japan's greatly resembles, the great arm of defence for her is the navy. There, also a programme looking forward as far as 1906 is completed. in the first place, the basis of the new fleet is the force of vessels which overcame the Chinese navy. Then there are the ships which were captured from China, or at least the part of them that can be repaired. It further appears that there were at that time building in Japan three fast modern cruisers, while she had ordered in England two fine large battle ships, that have since been launched, and before long will be added to her available fleet.

But in addition the Japanese Diet has provided for many other vessels. According to published figures there are to be two stages in the shipbuilding programme. The first, which includes 54 vessels, reckoning large and small, and displacing an aggregate of 45,890 tons, is to be completed in 1902, while the second, comprising 63 vessels, with an aggregate of 69,895 tons, will be finished four years later.

Here, then, is a provision for no fewer than 117 vessels with an aggregate of 115,785 tons, to be completed ten years hence. Japan is able to carry out this remarkable plan with the more ease from the fact that she has secured a very heavy war indemnity from China, which can be laid out on the first cost of the ships, but their maintenance will be no slight additional burden on the empire, although if her naval expenses are as small relatively to European as are her military expenses, she will have less to complain of.

Her determination, however, to make herself an element to be reckoned with among the navies of the world is plain, and she at once hastens the execution of her plan and perhaps deprecates foreign criticism of it by giving a part of the work to European and foreign shipyards. It is said that three battleships, three cruisers, a torpedo gunboat, a torpedo tender, four torpedo destroyers, and four first-class torpedo boats will be built abroad, and two of the cruisers are likely to be constructed in this country.

Alike in her industrial and her military and naval development the next ten years will no doubt see great progress in Japan, and she is plainly preparing herself for a leading role in determining the fortunes of the far East.

## HIS COMPANION.

Last night I took a long stroll with the one I love best in all the world. I should think you would get tired of walking by yourself.

## LONDON'S OMNIBUS THIEVES.

**Their Work so Profitable That They Ran a Line of Pirate Vehicles of Their Own.**

One of the happiest hunting grounds for a pickpocket is a London omnibus! People have been warned of this over and over again; notices are kept continually pasted on the doors and windows of the 'bus; conductors watch with keen and suspicious eyes doubtful-looking passengers, and yet all this energy seems to make little or no difference to the pickpockets. They seem to thrive almost as well as if 'buses were provided for their special edification, and there are quite a large number of thieves in London who make a living by working almost entirely in public conveyances.

One gang in particular was broken up long ago. It consisted of about twenty-three men, and was known—on account of a practice they had of slinging a hooked stick over their arms—as the "Crooked Stick Gang." It was started in 1893, and the originator was an exceedingly clever thief with whom the police desired further acquaintance. He started this brilliant idea by giving an "At Home" in the Seven Dials. He hired a room in a public house for the purpose (as he informed the landlord) of holding a "Friendly Lead," but as a matter of fact the people who turned up were one and all practised pickpockets, and the outcome of this meeting was the formation of a sort of Thieves' Union, the object of which was to prey upon unwary people who travel in omnibuses and trams and public conveyances generally. The members

WORKED IN PAIRS,

the one thieving and the other watching that he did not cheat his fellows. This system worked remarkably well for a time. Each pair of thieves had a number of ingenious disguises; on different occasions they exchanged routes; and as they kept a particular record of their proceedings and were careful not to work too often in the same district, they were for a long time undetected. At the end of each day they met at a public house, previously appointed, for dividing their spoils; and a fair idea of the profits of the concern will be gathered from the fact that they have divided as much as $650 on a single day.

After a time the conductors of the 'buses (especially in principal thoroughfares like Piccadilly) got to know the gang, and become strangely short-sighted when one of them hailed them from the pavement. They treated them with an indifference that was galling, and their behavior seemed especially brutal when the passengers with the "crooked stick" happened to be an old white-haired gentleman with gold eyeglasses.

When at last business became so involved that the directors of the omnibus companies began to employ detectives to watch them, the gang thought it advisable to run 'buses of their own, and they did. They started a number of "pirate" 'buses, and as just somewhere about this time the company 'buses raised their fares, they easily got a large number of passengers by retaining the old prices. They were very careful, however, to stop only for well-dressed and respectable-looking people, and it was a strange thing if a passenger did not miss something before he or she reached the end of the journey.

Each person who entered the 'bus was, of course, most

CAREFULLY WATCHED.

The cry "All fares," gave the thieves a clue to the whereabouts of the purses, and a short time after they were replaced they were skillfully removed by the "working members." One of the gang who manipulated matters inside the 'bus was a most dexterous pickpocket. It was his boast that he could extract a purse with a pair of sugar tongs, and he has been known to steal one, remove all the money, and then quietly replace it in the owner's pocket without exciting the slightest suspicion.

For a while these "pirate" 'buses succeeded even better than the others. On some occasions a single 'bus has yielded over twenty purses a day, some of them containing as much as $75, and it was seldom that a pocket was picked without something of value being found.

At last, however, complaints at Scotland Yard became so numerous that the authorities set a special detective on the track of the crooked sticks, with the result that one of the members was caught red-handed, and this led shortly afterwards to the arrest of several others. After that it was not long before they were entirely broken up. Without a head they were incapable of working systematically, and they scattered in every direction—mostly to Portland, where many of them are still "doing time."

## MAKES HIS HOME IN A TOMB.

**Eccentric Jonathan Reed Has Furnished His Vault Sumptuously.**

The officials of Evergreen cemetery, in Brooklyn, N.Y., have asked Jonathan Reed, an eccentric millionaire, to cease making the tomb of his wife his daily abiding place.

Mr. Reed's wife died three year's ago. He was devotedly attached to her and a year after her death caused the body to be removed from the tomb of her father's family and placed in the vault in Evergreen cemetery. Within the vault are two handsome steel coffins of precisely the same size. In one reposes the body of his wife; the other is designed for himself.

Mr. Reed has spent a good part of each day since its construction in beautifying the vault and its environment—in making the interior as much as possible like the home of the dead wife. Thither he has removed all her trinkets, her favorite books, the cage that once contained her favorite canary, and the chair she used to sit it.

On fine days the bereaved husband occupies a chair at the entrance of the vault, where he is visited by hundreds of persons, who ask him all sorts of questions: It is the assembling of these curious ones that the cemetery authorities object to.