AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It chanced that on a fine spring morning Henchard and Farfrae met in the Chestnut Walk which ran along the south wall of the town. Each had just come out from his early breakfast, and there was not another soul near. Henchard was reading a letter from Lucetta, sent in answer to a note from him, in which she made some excuse for not immediately granting him a second interview that he had desired.

Donald had no wish to enter into conversation with his former friend on their present constrained terms; neither would he pass him in scowling silence. He nodded, and Henchard did the same. They had receded from each other several paces when a voice cried "Farfrae!" It was Henchard's, who stood regarding him.

"Do you remember," said Henchard, as if it were the presence of the thought and not of the man which made him speak; "do you remember my story of that second woman—who suffered for her thoughtless devotion to me?"

"I do," said Farfrae.

"Do you remember my telling 'ee how it all began, and how it ended?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have offered to marry her now that I can; but she won't marry me. Now what would you think of her—I put it to you?"

"Well, ye owe her nothing more now," said Farfrae heartily.

"It is true," said Henchard, and went on.

That he had looked up from a letter to ask his questions completely shut out from Farfrae's mind all vision of Lucetta as the culprit. Indeed, her present position was so different from that of the young woman of Henchard's story as of itself to be sufficient to blind him absolutely to her identity. As for Henchard, he was reassured by Farfrae's words and manner against a suspicion which had crossed his mind. They were not those of a conscious rival.

Yet there was a rivalry by some one he was firmly persuaded. To discover whose presence that was—whether really Farfrae's after all, or another's—he exerted himself to the utmost to see her again; and at length succeeded.

At the interview, when she offered him tea, he made it a point to launch a cautious inquiry if she knew Mr. Farfrae.

Oh yes, she knew him, she declared; she could not help knowing almost everybody in Casterbridge, living in such a gazebo over the centre and arena of the town.

"Pleasant young fellow," said Henchard.

"Yes," said Lucetta.

"We both know him," said kind Elizabeth-Jane, to relieve her companion's divined embarrassment.

There was a knock at the door; literally, three full knocks and a little one at the end.

"That kind of a knock means half-and-half—somebody between gentle and simple," said the corn-merchant to himself. "I shouldn't wonder therefore if it is he." In a few seconds surely enough Donald walked in.

Lucetta was full of little fidgets and flutters, which increased Henchard's suspicions without affording any special proof of their correctness. He was well-nigh ferocious at the sense of the queer situation in which he stood towards this woman. And now he sat at her tea-table eager to gain her attention, and, in his amatory rage, feeling the other man present to be a villain, just as any young fool of a lover might feel.

They sat stifly side by side at the darkening table, like some Tuscan painting of the two disciples supping at Emmaus. Lucetta, forming the third and chief figure, was opposite them; Elizabeth-Jane, being out of the game, and out of the group, could observe from afar all things.

"More bread and butter?" said Lucetta to Henchard and Farfrae equally, holding out between them a plateful of long slices. Henchard took a slice by one end and Donald by the other; each feeling certain he was the man meant; neither let go, and the slice came in two.

"Oh—I am so sorry!" cried Lucetta, with a nervous titter. Farfrae tried to laugh; but he was too much in love to see the incident in any but a tragic light.

"How ridiculous of all three of them!" said Elizabeth to herself.

Henchard left the house with a ton of conjecture, though without a grain of proof, that the counter attraction was Farfrae; and therefore he would not make up his mind. Yet to Elizabeth-Jane it was plain as the town-pump that Donald and Lucetta were incipient lovers. More than once, in spite of her care, Lucetta had been unable to restrain her glance from flitting across into Farfrae's eyes like a bird to its nest. But Henchard was constructed upon too large a scale to discern such minutiae as these by an evening light, which to him were as the notes of a grasshopper that lie above the compass of the human ear.

But he was disturbed. And the sense of occult rivalry in suitorship was so much superadded to the palpable rivalry of their business lives. To the coarse materiality of that rivalry it added an infanding soul.

The thus vitalised antagonism took the form of action by Henchard sending for Jopp, the manager originally displaced by Farfrae's arrival. Henchard had frequently met this man about the streets, observed that his clothing spoke of neediness, heard that he lived in Mixen Lane—a back slum of the town, the pis aller of Casterbridge domiciliation—itself almost a proof that a man had reached a stage when he would not stick at trifles.

Jopp came after dark, by the gates of the store-yard, and felt his way through the hay and straw to the office where Henchad sat in solitude awaiting him.

"I am again out of a foreman," said the corn-factor. "Are you in a place?"

"Not so much as a beggar's, sir."

"How much do you ask?"

Jopp named his price, which was very moderate.

"When can you come?"

"At this hour and moment, sir," said Jopp, who, standing hands-pocketed at the street-corner till the sun had faded the shoulders of his coat to scarecrow green, had regularly watched Henchard in the market-place, measured him, and learnt him, by virtue of the power which the still man has in his stillness of knowing the busy one better than he knows himself. Jopp, too, had had a convenient experience; he was the only one in Casterbridge besides Henchard and the close-lipped Elizabeth who knew that Lucetta came truly from Jersey, and but proximately from Bath. "I know Jersey, too, sir," he said. "Was living there when you used to do business that way. Oh yes—have often seen ye there."

"Indeed! Very good. Then the thing is settled. The testimonials you showed me when you first tried for't are sufficient."

That characters deteriorate in time of need possibly did not occur to Henchard. Jopp said, "Thank you," and stood more firmly, in the consciousness that at last he officially belonged to that spot.

"Now," said Henchard, digging his strong eyes into Jopp's face, "one thing is necessary to me, as the biggest corn and hay dealer in these parts. The Scotchman who's taking the town trade so bold into his hands must be cut out. D've hear? We two can't live side by side—that's clear and certain."

"I've seen it all," said Jopp.

"By fair competition I mean of course," Henchard continued. "But as hard, keen, and unflinching as fair—rather more so. By such a desperate bid against him for the farmer's custom as will grind him into the ground starve him out. I've capital, mind ye, and I can do it."

"I'm all that way of thinking," said the new foreman. Jopp's dislike of Farfrae as the man who had once usurped his place, while it made him a willing tool, made him, at the same time, commercially as unsafe a colleague as Henchard could have chosen.

"I sometimes think," he added, "that he must have some glass that he sees next year in. He has such a knack of making everything bring him fortune."

"He's deep beyond all honest men's discerning; but we must make him shallower. We'll under-sell him, and overbuy, him, and so snuff him out."

They then entered into specific details of the process by which this would be accomplished, and parted at a late hour.

Elizabeth-Jane heard by accident that Jopp had been engaged by her stepfather. She was so fully convinced that he was not the right man for the place that, at the risk of making Henchard angry, she expressed her apprehension to him when they met. But it was done to no purpose. Henchard shut up her argument with a sharp rebuff.

The season's weather seemed to favour their scheme. The time was in the years immediately before foreign competition had revolutionized the trade in grain, when still, as from the earliest ages, the wheat quotations from month to month depended entirely upon the home harvest. A bad harvest or the prospect of one, would double the price of corn in a few weeks; and the promise of a good yield would lower it as rapidly. Prices were like the roads of the period steep in gradient, reflecting in their phases the local conditions, without engineering, levellings, or averages.

The farmer's income was ruled by the wheat-crop within his own horizon, and the wheat-crop by the weather. Thus, in person, he became a sort of flesh-barometer, with feelers always directed to the sky and wind around him. The local atmosphere was everything to him; the atmospheres of other countries a matter of indifference. The people, too, whow ere notf armers, the rural multitude, saw in the god of the weather a more important personage than they do now. Indeed, the feeling of the peasantry in this matter was so intense as to be almost unrealisable in these equable days. Their impulse was well-nigh to prostrate themselves in lamentation before untimely rains and tempests, which came as the Alastor of those households whose crime it was to be poor.

After midsummer they watched the weather-cocks as men waiting in antechambers watch the lackey. Sun elated them; quiet rain sobered them; weeks of watery tempest stupefied them. That aspect of the sky which they now regard as disagreeable they then beheld as furious.

It was June, and the weather was very unfavorable. Casterbridge, being, as it were, the bell-board on which all the adjacent hamlets and villages sounded their notes, was decidedly dull. Instead of new articles in the shop-windows, those that had been rejected in the foregoing summer were brought out again; superseded reap-hooks, badly-shaped rakes, shop-worn leggins, and time-stiffened water-tights reappeared, furbished up as near to new as possible.

Henchard, backed by Jopp, read a disastrous garnering, and resolved to base his strategy against Farfrae upon that reading. But before acting he wished—what so many have wished—that he could know for certain what was at present only strong probability. He was superstitious—as such headstrong natures often are—and he nourished in his mind an idea bearing on the matter; an idea he shrank from disclosing even to Jopp.

In a lonely hamlet a few miles from the town—so lonely, that what are called lonely villages were teeming by comparison—there lived a man of curious repute as a forecaster or weather prophet. The way to his house was crooked and miry—even difficult in the present unpropitious season. One evening when it was raining so heavily that ivy and laurel resounded like distant musketry, and an out-door man could be excused for shrouding himself to his ears and eyes, such a shrouded figure on foot might have been perceived travelling in the direction of the hazel-copse which dripped over the prophet's cot. The turn-pike road became a lane, the lane a cart-track; the cart-track bridle-path, the bridle-path a foot-way, the foot-way overgrown. The solitary walker slipped here and there, and stumbled over the natural springes formed by the brambles, till at length he reached the house, which, with its garden, was surrounded with a high, dense hedge. The cottage, comparatively a large one, had been built of mud by the occupier's own hands, and thatched also by himself. Here he had always lived, and here it was presumed he would die.

He existed on unseen supplies; for it was an anomalous thing that while there was hardly a soul in the neighborhood but affected to laugh at this man's assertions, uttering the formula, "There's nothing in 'em," with full assurance on the surface of their faces, very few of them were unbelievers in their secret hearts. Whenever they consulted him they did it "for a fancy." When they paid him they said "Just a trifle for Christmas," or "Candlemas," as the case might be.

Behind his back he was called "Wide-oh," on account of his reputation; to his face, "Mr." Fall.

The hedge of his garden formed an arch over the entrance, and a door was inserted as in a wall. Outside the door the tall traveller stopped, bandaged his face with a handkerchief as if he were suffering from toothache, and went up the path. The window shutters were not closed, and he could see the prophet within, preparing his supper.

In answer to the knock Fall came to the door, candle in hand. The visitor stepped back a little from the light, and said, "Can I speak to ye?" in significant tones. The other's invitation to come in was responded to by the country form. "This will do, thank ye," after which the householder has no alternative but to come out. He placed the candle on the corner of the dresser, took his hat from a nail, and joined the stranger in the porch, shutting the door behind him.

"I've long heard that you can—do things of a sort?" began the other, repressing his individuality as much as he could.

"Maybe so, Mr. Henchard," said the weather-caster.

"Ah—why do you call me that? asked the visitor with a start.

"Because it's your name. Feeling you'd come, I've waited for ye; and thinking you might be leery from your walk I laid two supper plates—look ye here." He threw open the door and disclosed the supper-table, at which appeared a second chair, knife and fork, plate and mug, as he had declared.

Henchard felt like Saul at his reception by Samuel; he remained in silence for a few moments, then throwing off the disguise of frigidity which he had hitherto preserved, he said, "Then I have not come in vain. . . Now, for instance, can ye charm away warts?"

"Without trouble."

"Cure the evil?"

"That I've done—with consideration—if they will wear the toad-bag by night as well as by day."

"Forecast the weather?"

"With labor and time."

"Then take this," said Henchard "'Tis a crown-piece. Now, what is the harvest fortnight to be? When can I know?"

"I've worked it out already, and you can know at once." (The fact was that five farmers had already been there on the same errand from different parts of the country.) "By the sun, moon, and stars, by the clouds, the winds, the trees, and grass, the candle-flame and swallow, the smell of the herbs; likewise by the cats' eyes, the ravens, the leeches, the spiders, and the dung-mixen, the last fortnight in August will be—rain and tempest."

"You are not certain, of course?"

"As one can be in a world where all's unsure. 'Twill be more like living in Revelations this autumn than in England. Shall I sketch it out for ye in a scheme?"

"Oh, no, no," said Henchard. "I don't altogether believe in forecasts, come to second thoughts on such. But I——"

"You don't—you don't—'tis understood," said Wide-oh, without a sound of scorn. "You have given me a crown because you've one too many But won't you join me at supper, now 'tis waiting and all?"

Henchard would gladly have joined, for the savour of the stew had floated from the cottage into the porch with such appetising distinctness, that the meat, the onions, the pepper, and the herbs could be severally recognized by his nose. But as sitting down to hob-and-nob there would have seemed to mark him too implicitly as the weather-caster's apostle, he declined, and went his way.

The next Saturday Henchard bought grain to such an enormous extent that there was quite a talk about his purchases among his neighbors, the lawyer, the wine merchant, and the doctor; also on the next, and on all available days. When his granaries were full to choking, all the weather-cocks of Casterbridge creaked and set their faces in another direction, as if tired of the south-west. The weather changed; the sunlight, which had been like tin for weeks, assumed the hues of topaz. The temperament of the welkin passed from the phlegmatic to the sanguine; an excellent harvest was almost a certainty; and as a consequence prices rushed down.

All these transformations, lovely to the outsider, to the wrong-headed corn-dealer were terrible. He was reminded of what he had well known before, that a man might gamble upon the square green areas of fields as readily as upon those of a card-room.

Henchard had backed bad weather, and apparently lost. He had mistaken the turn of the flood for the turn of the ebb. His dealings had been so extensive that settlement could not long be postponed, and to settle, he was obliged to sell off corn that he had bought only a few weeks before at figures higher by many shillings a quarter. Much of the corn he had never seen; it had not even been moved from the ricks in which it lay stacked miles away. Thus he lost heavily.

In the blaze of an early August day he met Farfrae in the market-place. Farfrae knew of his dealings (though he did not guess their intended bearing on himself) and commiserated him; for since their exchange of words in the South Walk they had been on stiffly-speaking terms. Henchard, for the moment, appeared to resent the sympathy; but he suddenly took a careless turn.

"Ho, no, no!—nothing serious, man!" he cried with fierce gaiety. "These things always happen, don't they? I know it has been said that figures have touched me tight lately; but is that anything rare? The case is not so bad as folk make out perhaps, And dammy, a man must be a fool to mind the common hazards of trade!"

But he had to enter the Casterbridge Bank that day for reasons which had never before sent him there—and to sit a long time in the partner's room with a constrained bearing. It was rumored soon after that much real property, as well as vast stores of produce, in the town and neighborhood, which had stood in Henchard's name, was actually the property of his bankers.

Coming down the steps of the bank he encountered Jopp. The gloomy transactions just completed within had added fever to the original sting of Farfrae's sympathy that morning, which Henchard fancied might be satire disguised, so that Jopp met with anything but a bland reception. The latter was in the act of taking off his hat to wipe his forehead, and saying, "A fine hot day," to an acquaintance.

"You can wipe and wipe, and say "A fine hot day," can ye! cried Henchard in a savage undertone, imprisoning Jopp between himself and the Bank wall. "If it hadn't been for your fool's advice it might have been a fine day enough. Why did ye let me go on, hey—when a word of doubt from you or anybody would have made me think twice, that you can never be sure of weather till 'tis past."

"My advice, sir, was to do what you thought best."

"A useful fellow; and the sooner you help somebody else in that way the better! Henchard continued his address to Jopp in similar terms till it ended in Jopp's dismissal there and then, Henchard turning upon his heel and leaving him.

"You shall be sorry for this, sir; sorry as a man can be!" said Jopp, standing pale, and looking after the corn-merchant as he disappeared in the crowd of market-men hard by.

(To be continued.)

WINTER WRINKLES.

He—"Well, your sister is married. Now it's your turn." She—"Oh George! ask papa."

Tourist—"Are we near the falls?" Guide—"Yes, sir. As soon as the ladies stop talking you can hear the roar."

"Is your picture in the academy a success?" "That's what I am wondering. Some one said it was worth the price of admission."

He—"Jones is all right, I suppose, but he and I do not like each other a bit." She—"Well, that is much to the credit of both of you."

Dabney—"Gilbney started on a century run to-day." Babley—"Where has he gone?" Dabney—"After the fellow who stole his wheel."

Amateur Humorist—"That's a pretty good joke of mine; don't you think so?" Experienced Editor—"Well, it is just as funny now as it ever was."

Robert—"When I get into my new house I mean that everything shall go like clockwork." Richard—"I see; the same as heretofore; tick, tick."

Bobby—"Is oxygen what the oxen breathe all day?" Papa—"Of course, and what everything else breathes." Bobby—"And is nitrogen what every one breathes at night?"

The English language must be tough,
At lest, that's what I've reckoned,
For it is still alive to-day.
Though murdered every second.

"Why do you hate soap so?" asked the inquisitive lady. "I don't," said Mr. Dismal Dawson. "I simply ignore it. We don't move in the same set; that's all."

Brown—"I wonder who originated the idea that it is unlucky to begin anything on Friday? Robinson—"Probably it was some lazy individual who preferred to wait until Saturday."

"You don't mean to say you become engaged to him after but five hours' acquaintance?" "Certainly. How much time would you have me devote to one engagement.

This world is but a fleeting show,
And few are they, alas!
Who can rake up a pull that's strong
Enough for a free pass.

"Those Eskimos up in Alaska have good, sound, common sense." "How so?" "Why, when they fall in love with a girl they announce it by sending her a sealskin sacque."

Sister—"There you have candy all over your new suit! What will mamma say?" Little Brother—"Well, mamma won't let me have any fun in these clothes till I get 'em spoiled."

"What I want," said the lawyer, "is to prove that my client is mentally deficient." "Certainly," replied the expert. "There won't be the least trouble in showing that as long as he has employed you as his lawyer."

Prof. (lecturing)—"Oxygen, gentlemen, is essential to all animal existence; there could be no life without it. Strange to say, it was not discovered until a century ago, when—" Student—"What did they do before it was discovered, professor?"

"May I write you a poem on the beautiful snow?" asked the poet, timidly. "Yes," thundered the editor, "go out, squat down in the snow and write. In the meantime, I'll sit here and pray that as fast as you write the sun will thaw it out."

LI HUNG'S COFFIN.

Said to Have Been Burned by Accident, and He is Glad of It.

Among the thousand or more pieces of baggage which Li Hung Chang took with him in his Western travels the one that excited the greatest curiosity was, without doubt, his coffin. The Viceroy's age at that time already exceeded the Biblical limit of threescore years and ten. At a family council held before his setting out from home the chances of a man of his age surviving the fatigue of a long ocean voyage were discussed and decided to be very small. Accordingly preparations were made for the worst, and a coffin was added to his baggage. But the old man proved that he was made of tougher stuff than was generally supposed. When he reached England he felt that he had strength and vitality enough to carry him through the remainder of his journey, and gave orders that the constant reminder of his approaching death be shipped back to China.

The coffin got as far as the Suez Canal. There, as recent advices from the East have it, fire broke out in the steamer, and Li Hung Chang's coffin added fuel to the flames.

There is no doubt that the Viceroy looks upon the loss as a good omen. If he is not above superstition, he will interpret it to mean that he has not yet come near the end of his earthly career, inasmuch as the boards that are to hold his mortal remains have still to be fashioned.

THE WEATHER AND CRIME

EFFECT OF CLIMATIC INFLUENCES ON CERTAIN NATURES.

Startling Statements by Criminologists—Murderers Plan Their Evil Deeds on Cold Clear Days.

Atmospheric conditions have a much greater influence upon human nature and the everyday doings of mankind than the average man or woman understands. Some of the most ordinary occupations are more or less influenced by the prevailing conditions of the weather, and the police could tell, if they chose, that even crime is more or less prevalent under varying meteorological conditions.

That man's mental functions are to a great or less extent governed by his physical condition has long been an acknowledged fact among physicians and scientists. Just how far, however, the weather is directly responsible for the shortcomings or evil-doings of mankind the medical profession and laymen interested in such research are only beginning to find out. One authority in London contends this:—

A man who attempts to commit a deliberate murder would plan it on a clear, cold day rather than during suicide weather. Burglary would also be planned and carried out when the atmosphere is clear and bracing rather than when it is heavy and depressing.

It seems a peculiar thing, but in the summer-time poison and the bullet seem to be the favorable methods of both murder and self-destruction, while in winter the

ROPE AND KNIFE

appear to be the most popular modes of ending the existence of either self or another.

The police along the side of the Thames know full well in just what kind of weather to look for suicides, and exactly what meteorological conditions are productive of other crime. On a sultry summer night, when even breathing seems an exertion, the constable on whose beat suicide-steps are located keeps a sharp watch on all who wander down to the river.

"Why it is," said he, "I do not know; but I can always tell when there is trouble ahead. During the heat of midsummer people seem to have a perfect mania for coming down to the Thames and jumping overboard on purpose. I gave up long ago trying to account for it, but it is a fact, nevertheless. Just as soon as the cool weather comes there is a decrease in the number of suicides, and murders begin."

When very moist, the atmosphere is a much better conductor of electricity than at any other time. Then the natural electricity is drawn from the body, and this has a tendency to destroy vitality and so weaken the mental faculties. A man or woman who lives much alone is, as a rule, much more easily influenced by the conditions of the weather than are others. So a person who has

MANY TROUBLES

and is constantly thinking of them, is much more susceptible to any sudden atmospheric change than what is commonly termed a strong minded, mentally well-balanced individual.

The same peculiar effect of the weather upon the mind has been noticed in different climates. In the torrid zone suicide is much more frequent than in higher latitudes, while on the other hand, the people of cold countries have perpetrated some of the most atrocious murders on record, outdoing for useless brutality and savagery any crime ever perpetrated.

That the weather has a wonderfully acute influence on even the normal mind cannot be denied. How often we speak of "depressing weather," weather that makes one feel "blue" to a degree. "Bracing weather," that makes the blood tingle in our veins and inspires active exertion, a stimulation of ideas; "morbid weather," that brings to our minds all sorts of lugubrious thoughts; "lazy weather," that is productive of loafing and creates languor and a feeling of "dolce far niente."

"Blessed is the bride that the sun shines on, and blessed are the dead that the rain rains on," says the old saw, and as a result we have bridal weather and funeral weather.

WITH THE ROENTGEN RAY.

A Cent a Child Had Swallowed Located and Successfully Removed.

A Roentgen ray surgical operation was performed by Dr. F. W. Zimmer of Rochester, N.Y., the other day which will be of great interest to surgeons. A child twenty-two months old swallowed a cent sixteen days ago. With a radiograph the cent was approximately located a week ago in the aesophagus. A prolonged attempt was then made by ordinary means to extract the coin, but without success.

It was finally determined to use the fluoroscope during the operation, the observer directing the movements from his observation of the coin, and metal instruments as they appeared on the fluoroscope screen. Thin boards were placed across two boxes and the patient was placed under the Crookes tube.

The observer placed himself beneath and with the use of the new metallic screen of inch mesh definitely located the coin. The tube was then placed under the patient, and Dr. Zimmer proceeded to grasp the coin under the direction of the observer.

It was highly successful, the coin being removed after slipping once or twice from the forceps. The patient was under the influence of ether, and the observer saw every movement of the forceps. The patient is now considered out of danger.

During his entire career, Stradivarius made from 6,000 to 7,000 violins. Few of these were sold for more than $25 during his life. Now some of them command $10,000 each.