AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was the eve of harvest. Prices being low Farfrae was buying. As was usual, after reckoning too surely on weather, the local farmers had flown to the other extreme, and (in Farfrae's opinion) were selling off too recklessly—calculating with just a trifle too much certainty upon an abundant yield. So he went on buying old corn at its comparatively ridiculous price: for the product of the previous year, though not large, had been of excellent quality.

When Henchard had squared his affairs in a disastrous way, and got rid of his burdensome purchases at a monstrous loss, the harvest began. There were three days of excellent weather, and then—"What if that cust conjuror should be right after all!" said Henchard.

The fact was that no sooner had the sickles begun to play than the atmosphere suddenly felt as if cress would grow in it without other nourishment. It rubbed people's cheeks like damp flannel when they walked abroad. There was a gusty, high, warm wind; isolated raindrops starred the window-panes at remote distances; the sunlight would flap out like a quickly-opened fan, throw the pattern of the window upon the floor of the room in a milky, colourless shine, and withdraw as suddenly as it had appeared.

From that day and hour it was clear that there was not to be so successful an ingathering after all. If Henchard had only waited long enough he might at least have avoided loss, though he had not made a profit. But the momentum of his character knew no patience. At this third turn of the scales he remained silent. The movements of his mind seemed to tend to the thought that some power was working against him.

"I wonder," he asked himself with eerie misgiving, "I wonder if it can be that somebody has been roasting a waxen image of me, or stirring an unholy brew to confound me! I don't believe in such power; and yet—what if they should ha' been doing it!" Even he could not admit that the perpetrator, if any, might be Farfrae. These isolated hours of superstition came to Henchard in time of moody depression, when all his practical largeness of view has oozed out of him.

Meanwhile Donald Farfrae prospered. He had purchased in so depressed a market that the present moderate stiffness of prices was sufficient to pile for him a large heap of gold where a little one had been.

"Why, he'll soon be Mayor!" said Henchard. It was indeed hard that the speaker should, of all others, have to follow the triumphal chariot of this man to the Capitol.

The rivalry of the masters was taken up by the men.

September night-shades had fallen upon Casterbridge; the clocks had struck half-past eight, and the moon had risen. The streets of the town were curiously silent for such a comparatively early hour. A sound of jangling horse-bells and heavy wheels passed up the street. These were followed by angry voices outside Lucetta's house, which led her and Elizabeth-Jane to run to the windows, and pull up the blinds.

The opposite Market-House and Town Hall abutted against its next neighbor the Church except in the lower storey, where an arched thoroughfare gave admittance to a large square called Bull Stake. A stone post arose in the midst, to which the oxen had formerly been tied for baiting with dogs, to make them tender before they were killed in the adjoining shambles. In a corner stood the stocks.

The thoroughfare leading to this spot was now blocked by two four-horse waggons and horses, laden with hay-trusses, the leaders having already passed each other, and become entangled head to tail. The passage of the vehicles might have been practicable if empty; but built up with hay to the bedroom windows, as they were it was impossible.

"You must have done it a' purpose!" said Farfrae's waggoner. "You can hear my horses' bells half-a-mile such a night as this."

"If ye'd been minding your business instead of zwailing along in such a gawk-hammer way, you would have seed me," retorted the wroth representative of Henchard.

However, according to the strict rule of the word it appeared that Henchard's man was most in the wrong; he therefore attempted to back into the High Street. In doing this the near hind-wheel rose against the churchyard wall, and the whole mountainous load went over, two of the four wheels rising in the air, and the legs of the thill-horse.

Instead of considering how to gather up the load the two men closed in a fight with their fists. Before the first round was quite over Henchard came upon the spot, somebody having run for him.

Henchard sent the two men staggering in contrary directions by collaring one with each hand, turned to the horse that was down and extricated him afte rsome trouble. He then inquired into the circumstances; and seeing the state of his waggon and its load, began hotly rating Farfrae's man.

Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane had by this time run down to the door and opened it, whence they watched the bright heap of new hay lying in the moon's rays and passed and re-passed by the forms of Henchard and the waggoners. The women had witnessed what nobody else had seen—the origin of the mishap; and Lucetta spoke.

"I saw it all, Mr. Henchard," she cried; "and your man was most in the wrong!"

Henchard paused in his harangue and turned. "Oh, I didn't notice you, Miss Templeman," said he. "My man in the wrong? Ah, to be sure; to be sure! But I beg your pardon notwithstanding. The other's is the empty waggon, and he must have been most to blame for coming on."

"No; I saw it, too" said Elizabeth-Jane. "And I can assure you he couldn't help it."

"You can't trust their senses!" murmured Henchard's man.

"Why not?" asked Henchard sharply.

"Why, you see, sir, all the women side with Farfrae—being a young dand, and of the sort that he is—one that creeps into the maiden heart like the giddying worm into the sheep's brain—making crooked seem straight to their eyes."

"But do you know what that lady is you talk about in such a fashion? Do you know that I pay my attentions to her, and have for some time? Just be careful!"

"Not I. I know nothing, sir, outside eight shillings a week."

"And that Mr. Farfrae is well aware of that? He's sharp in trade, but he wouldn't do anything so underhand as what you hint at."

Whether because Lucetta heard this low dialogue, or not, her white figure disappeared from her doorway inward, and the door was shut before Henchard could reach it to converse with her further. This disappointed him, for he had been sufficiently disturbed by what the man had said to wish to speak to her more closely. While pausing the old constable came up.

"Just see that nobody drives against that hay and waggon to-night, Stubberd," said the corn-merchant. "It must bide till the morning for all hands are in the fields still. And if any coach or road-waggon wants to come along, tell 'em they must go round by the back street and be hanged to 'em. . . Any case to-morrow up in Hall?"

"Yes, sir. One in number, sir."

"Oh, what's that?"

"A old flagrant female, sir, swearing and staggering in a horrible profane manner against the church wall, sir, as if 'twere no more than a pot-house. That's all, sir."

"Oh. The Mayor's out o' town, isn't he?"

"He is, sir."

"Very well, then I'll be there. Don't forget to keep an eye on that hay. Good-night t'ye."

During those moments Henchard had determined to follow up Lucetta, notwithstanding her elusiveness, and he knocked for admission.

The answer he received was an expression of Miss Templeman's sorrow at being unable to see him again that evening, because she had an engagement to go out.

Henchard walked away from the door to the opposite side of the street, and stood by his hay, in a lonely reverie, the constable having strolled elsewhere and the horses being removed. Though the moon was not bright as yet there were no lamps lighted, and he entered the shadow of one of the protecting jambs which formed the thoroughfare to Bull Stake; here he watched Lucetta's door.

Candle-lights were flitting in and out of her bedroom, and it was obvious that she was dressing for the appointment, whatever the nature of that might be at such an hour. The lights disappeared, the clocks struck nine, and almost at the moment Farfrae came round the opposite corner and knocked. That she had been waiting just inside for him was certain; for she instantly opened the door herself. They went together by the way of All Saints' Lane southward, avoiding the front street; guessing at last where they were going, he determined to follow.

The harvest had been so delayed by the capricious weather, that whenever a fine day occurred all sinews were strained to save what could be saved of the damaged crops. On account of the rapid shortening of the days the harvesters worked by moonlight. Hence to-night the wheatfields abutting on the two sides of the square formed by Casterbridge town were animated by the gathering hands. Their shouts and laughter had reached Henchard at the Market House, while he stood there waiting, and he had little doubt from the turn which Farfrae and Lucetta had taken that they were bound for the spot.

Nearly the whole town had gone into the fields. The Casterbridge populace still retained the primitive habit of helping one another in time of need; and thus, though the corn belonged to the farming section of the little community—that inhabiting the Dummerford quarter—the remainder was no less interested in the labor of getting it home.

Reaching the end of the lane, Henchard crossed the shaded avenue on the walls, slid down the green rampart, and stood amongst the stubble. The "stitches" or shocks rose like tents about the yellow expanse, those in the distance becoming lost in the moonlit hazes.

He had entered at a point removed from the scene of immediate operations; but two others had entered at that place, and he could see them winding among the shocks. They were paying no regard to the direction of their walk, whose vague serpentining soon began to bear down towards Henchard. A meeting promised to be awkward, and he therefore stepped into the hollow of the nearest shock, and sat down.

"You have my leave," Lucetta was saying gaily. "Speak what you like."

"Well, then," replied Farfrae, with the unmistakable inflection of the lover pure, which Henchard had never heard in full resonance on his lips before; "you are sure to be much sought after for your position, wealth, talents, and beauty. But will ye resist the temptation to be one of those ladies with lots of admirers—ay—and be content to have only a homely one?"

"And he the speaker?" said she laughing. "Very well, sir, what next?"

"Ah! I'm afraid that what I feel will make me forget my manners!"

"Then I hope you'll never have any, if you lack them only for that cause." After some broken words, which Henchard lost, she added, "Are you sure you won't be jealous?"

Farfrae seemed to assure her that he would not, by taking her hand.

"You are convinced, Donald, that I love nobody else," she presently said. "But I should wish to have my own way in some things."

"In everything! What special thing did you mean?"

"If I wished not to live always in Casterbridge, for instance; on finding that I should not be happy here?"

Henchard did not hear the reply; he might have done so and much more, but he did not care to play the eaves-dropper. They went on towards the scene of activity, where the sheaves were being handed, a dozen a minute, upon the carts and waggons which carried them away.

Lucetta insisted on parting from Farfrae when they drew near the work-people. He had some business with them, and, though he entreated her to wait a few minutes, she was inexorable, and tripped off homeward alone.

Henchard thereupon left the field, and followed her. His state of mind was such that on reaching Lucetta's door he did not knock, but opened it, and walked straight up to her sitting-room, expecting to find her there. But the room was empty, and he perceived that in his haste he had somehow passed her on the way hither. He had not to wait many minutes, however, for he soon heard her dress rustling in the hall, followed by a soft closing of the door. In a moment she appeared.

The light was so low that she did not notice Henchard at first. As soon as she saw him she uttered a little cry, almost of terror.

"How can you frighten me so!" she exclaimed, with a flushed face. "It is past ten o'clock, and you have no right to surprise me here at such a time."

"I don't know that I've not the right. At any rate, I have the excuse. Is it so necessary that I should stop to think of manners and customs?"

"It is too late for propriety, and might injure me."

"I called an hour ago, and you would not see me, and I thought you were in when I called now. It is you, Lucetta, who are doing wrong. It is not proper in ye to throw me over like this. I have a little matter to remind you of, which you seem to forget."

She sank into a chair, and turned pale.

"I don't want to hear it—I don't want to hear it!" she said through her hands, as he, standing close to the edge of her dress, began to allude to the Jersey days.

"But you ought to hear it," said he.

"It came to nothing; and through you. Then why not leave me the freedom that I gained with such sorrow! Had I found that you proposed to marry me for pure love I might have felt bound now. But I soon learnt that you had planned it out of mere charity—almost as an unpleasant duty—because I had nursed you, and compromised myself somewhat, and you thought you must repay me. After that I did not care for you so deeply as before."

"Why did you come here to find me, then?"

"I thought I ought to marry you for conscience sake, since you were free, even though— I—did not like you so well."

"And why then don't you think so now?"

She was silent. It was only too obvious that conscience had ruled well enough till new love had intervened, and usurped that rule. In feeling this she herself forgot for the moment her partially-justifying argument—that having discovered Henchard's infirmities of temper, she had some excuse for not risking her happiness in his hands after once escaping them. The only thing she could say was, "I was a poor girl then; and now my circumstances have altered, so I am hardly the same person."

"That's true. And it makes the case awkward for me. But I don't want to touch your money. I am quite willing that every penny of your property shall remain to your personal use. Besides, that argument has nothing in it. The man you are thinking of is no better than I."

"If you were as good as he you would 'leave me!" she cried passionately.

This unluckily aroused Henchard. "You cannot in honor refuse me," he said. "And unless you give me your promise this very night to be my wife, before a witness, I'll reveal our intimacy—in common fairness to other men!"

A look of resignation settled upon her. Henchard saw its bitterness; and had Lucetta's heart been given to any other man in the world than Farfrae he would probably have had pity upon her at that moment. But the supplanter was the upstart (as Henchard called him) who had mounted into prominence upon his shoulders, and he could bring himself to show no mercy.

Without another word she rang the bell, and directed that Elizabeth-Jane should be fetched from her room. The latter appeared, surprised in the midst of her lucubrations. As soon as she saw Henchard she went across to him dutifully.

"Elizabeth-Jane," he said, taking her hand, "I want you to hear this." And turning to Lucetta: "Will you, or will you not, marry me?"

"If you—wish it, I must agree!"

"You say yes?"

"I do."

No sooner had she given the promise than she fell back in a fainting state

"What dreadful thing drives her to say this, father, when it is such a pain to her?" asked Elizabeth, kneeling down by Lucetta. "Don't compel her to do anything against her will. I have lived with her, and know that she cannot bear much."

"Don't be a no'thern simpleton!" said Henchard drily. "This promise will leave him free for you, if you want him, won't it."

At this Lucetta seemed to wake from her swoon with a start.

"Him? Who are you talking about?" she said wildly.

"Nobody, as far as I am concerned," said Elizabeth firmly.

"Oh—well. Then it is my mistake," said Henchard. "But the business is between me and Miss Templeman. She agrees to be my wife."

"But don't dwell on it just now," entreated Elizabeth, holding Lucetta's hand.

"I don't wish to, if she promises," said Henchard.

"I have, I have," groaned Lucetta, her limbs hanging like flails, from very misery and faintness. "Michael, please don't argue it any more!"

"I will not," he said. And taking up his hat he went away.

Elizabeth-Jane continued to kneel by Lucetta. "What is this?" she said. "You called my father "Michael" as if you knew him well? And how is it he has got this power over you, that you promise to marry him against your will? Ah—you have many, many secrets from me!"

"Perhaps you have some from me," Lucetta murmured, with closed eyes, little thinking, however, so unsuspicious was she, that the secret of Elizabeth's heart concerned the young man who had caused this damage to her own.

"I would not—do anything against you at all!" stammered Elizabeth, keeping in all signs of emotion till she was ready to burst. "I cannot understand how my father can command you so; I don't sympathize with him in it at all. I'll go to him and ask him to release you."

"No, no," said Lucetta. "Let it all be."

(To be continued.)

SOME PECULIAR PIPES.

The Kaffirs' Monster Tobacco Burner—Can Make a Clay One in a Minute.

The Kaffirs of South Africa are in many ways a remarkable people, but perhaps the most singular thing about them is their mode of smoking, and especially their pipes, writes a correspondent. The ordinary Kaffir pipe is a sufficiently formidable affair. It is almost as big and heavy as the "knob kerry," or war club, which it often considerably resembles in form; at a pinch it would make a formidable weapon in the hands of its muscular owner.

But it isn't every Kaffir who can afford an ornate pipe of this description, and every Kaffir must smoke—so he thinks. Curiously enough, the poorest man smokes the biggest pipe—the biggest, indeed, on the face of earth, for it is nothing less than the earth itself. I don't suppose that he is conceited—though the Kaffirs have plenty of conceit—as to imagine that he "owns the earth," but he does use it for a tobacco pipe—and this is

HOW HE DOES IT.

He has managed to procure a handful of tobacco, but has no regulation pipe. Shall he forego his smoke? Not he; necessity is certainly the mother of invention in this case. He first pours a little water on the ground and makes a sort of mud pipe.

He then takes a limber twig and bends it into the shape of a bow; this he buries in the mud in such a way that both ends protrude a little at the surface. He then waits a while for the mud to harden. He doesn't mind waiting, for a Kaffir has lots of time; and it isn't necessary to wait long, for the hot tropical sun bakes the clay very quickly. When he considers that the pie is "done to a turn," he pulls out the twig, which, of course, leaves a curved hole through the clay. At one end he scoops out a sort of bowl, in which he places his tobacco. At the other end he fashions a little mound to serve as a mouthpiece; it looks more like the opening of a small ant hill than anything else.

A European, probably, wouldn't relish a mouthpiece of mud—he couldn't use it, anyhow, for his nose would be too much in the way; but a Kaffir doesn't stick at trifles, and he has

NO NOSE TO SPEAK OF.

So he drops a live coal on the tobacco in the bowl, lies flat on the ground applies his thick lips to the orifice, and sucks away—drawing in vast quantities of the rankest, vilest smoke that ever made a human being gasp and choke.

For it is not enough that his tobacco is the coarsest and strongest and in every way the worst that the soil of this planet produces. Mere tobacco isn't potent enough to satisfy a Kaffir, though a single whiff of it would prostrate the most accomplished European smoker. So he mixes with it a liberal quantity of "dagha," a kind of hemp with intoxicating qualities similar to those of hashish. This is a drug powerful enough to paralyse even a South African, and by the time his pipe is finished the smoker frequently falls in a fit. In many cases he becomes quite insensible, and for a long time lies like a log; indeed—so pernicious is the stuff—he sometimes never arouses.

THE MINES OF CANADA.

Some Interesting Notes on the Slocan Country.

Though winter checks the ardour of the prospector in the Slocan, B.C., silver camps, work on the claims which laid in their winter supply goes on briskly. The Wellington has shipped five carloads since snow fell. They have struck another 37 inch vein of galena and grey copper, giving 500 of silver per ton, as the average of several tests and they have had to put on more men, The White Water is shipping two carloads per week, and the ore is remarkably rich, at times yielding in considerable quantities $1 per pound of silver and lead.

English capital is developing the Colorado, and the Sunset has got down to work for the winter.

The output, in fact, from the Wellington and White Water camp, as a whole, creates a general activity.

The Lone Star, though work only began late in the fall, has already run one tunnel 120 feet, 40 feet being through the ledge, and two others are being run at lower levels.

The Charleston also has four tunnels running up into big pay, it is said, and the owners of the Corinne or Corean are pushing work, as the Lone Star adjoining is, and saying little. The latter, with four other claims, has been capitalized as the Hansard.

It is reported that the Eldon has already withdrawn its stock from the market.

The Slocan Star has paid its fourth dividend since August, and in all $300,000, or three-fifths of the capital, 250,000, of this has been paid this year.

The fraction between the Eldon and Paradise was sold for $500 one day, its owner being in need of money, and the buyer resold the next day for $2,000. This small claim is entirely undeveloped, but in a rich camp.

The comparative ease with which mining is carried on in the Slocan silver district is shown by the work already done in the Charleston, the Corinne and the Lone Star. The former began in August last and the Corinne and Lone Star in November.

The influx of strangers on the lookout to buy claims only shows what the Slocan may expect in the spring.

ROUND THE WHOLE WORLD.

WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE GLOBE.

Old and New World Events of Interest Chronicled Briefly—Interesting Happenings of Recent Date.

Some letters by George Washington to Arthur Young, the economist, on the subject of agriculture are about to be sold in London.

William Onions, the London East End poet, better known as "Spring Onions," spent his Christmas in prison for being drunk and disorderly.

Signor Crispi has taken time by the forelock in having his marble monument erected in the Naples cemetery. The only inscription on it is "Crispi."

Greece has a population of 2,418,000, according to the census just taken, an increase of 230,000 since 1889 Athens has now 128,000 inhabitants.

Russia's Czarina, a worthy granddaughter of Queen Victoria, is fighting the practice of sucking tobacco prevalent among the women at the court. She is said also to have shut down on her husband's allowance of cigarettes. She is also said to be not so well liked as she was.

Earls as directors of stock companies come high in London. A broker who recently obtained two of them for a cycle company received $25,000 as his commission. As he kept the money himself instead of turning it into his firm's account his partners have brought the case before the committee of the Stock Exchange, thus making public the market price of the commodity.

British Generals have privileges not accorded to peers in the English police courts. Sir Reginald Gipps, who was recently summoned for riding a bicycle on a footpath at Aldershot, sent his servant to pay his fine of five shillings and to tender an apology, which the magistrate accepted. Several peers' wives who were guilty of carrying unmuzzled lapdogs in their carriages were obliged to attend court in person last year.

Swallow-wort, or the greater celandine (Chelidonium majus), which Dr. Denisenko asserts is a cure for cancer, has long been used by country people to remove warts. The doctor uses the juice of the plant diluted, both externally and internally, in external cases injecting the fluid hypodermically around the cancerous growth. According to the Lancet, however, experiments with his specific by other observers have not confirmed his results.

France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburg have just signed at The Hague the first international treaty on private law, the treaty relating to civil procedure. All these nations use the Roman law in some form. The Swedish and Norwegian Commissioners made certain reservations which prevented their signing the agreement. The treaty is to be followed by others on different portions of the law.

Ghent will soon be greatly transformed. Close together in the centre of the old city are a number of great monuments of Gothic architecture, the Belfry, St. Bavon Cathedral, the Church of St. Nicholas, the Cloth Hall, the Town Hall, and the manor house of Gerard the Devil. The city authorities have borrowed 70,000,000 francs, a large part of which will be devoted to tearing down the intervening buildings and such as interfere with the view, and leaving the monumental structures in a large public park in the heart of the town.

Lord Savile's estates have already paid more death duties than any others in England, and now that he is dead must pay a tax of a million dollars to the Treasury. He and his brothers were the illegitimate sons of the eighth Earl of Scarborough, who bequeathed to the eldest as much of his property as he could. As in law they were not related to each other, the heaviest death duties were imposed whenever the estates changed hands, and this has happened three times in fifteen years. The late baron was raised to the peerage in 1888 and to continue the title a special remainder had to be created in favor of his nephews, as if they had been strangers in blood.

HIS HEAD WAS OFF.

But the Bandit Chief Walked to Each of His Comrades.

Dr. Loye, the French physician, who has greatly interested himself in the question: "What passes in the head of a decapitated human being," writes the following remarkable story, which he says was taken from the archives of the Vienna courts: It was in the year—that Sharenburg, a well-known bandit, and four of his associates were caught and condemned to death. They were already on their knees ready to pay the penalty of their bloody deeds by submitting to the awful fate of decapitation, when Sharenburg addressed the Judge, asking that his four companions might be pardoned on certain conditions. "If," asked the bandit chief, "I am beheaded, I get up and walk, to the first of my comrades will you pardon him?" The Judge thought that he was pretty safe in complying with the request. "Then," continued Sharenburg, "if I walk to the second, the third and the fourth, will you pardon them also?" The Judge replied that if such a miraculous feat could be performed he would obtain pardon for the other three also. The chief was now satisfied, and, bending his head he received the fatal blow. Instantly the head rolled down in the sand, but to the surprise and horror of all present, the headless trunk arose and walked alone. Aimlessly, it appeared, the body walked around until it passed the first, the second, the third and the fourth condemned bandit, when it fell and became motionless. Query: How could a headless body think?