AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

At this date there prevailed in Casterbridge a convivial custom—scarcely recognised as such, yet none the less established. On the afternoon of every Sunday a large contingent of the Casterbridge journeymen—steady churchgoers and sedate characters having attended service, filed from the church doors across the way to the King of Prussia Inn. The rear was usually brought up by the choir, with their bass-viols, fiddles, and flutes under their arms.

The great point, the point of honour, on these sacred occasions, was for each man to strictly limit himself to half-a-pint of liquor. This scrupulosity was so well understood by the landlord, that the whole company was served in cups of that measure. They were all exactly alike—straight-sided, with leafless lime-trees done in ell-brown on the sides—one towards the drinker's lips, the other confronting his comrade. To wonder how many of these cups the landlord possessed altogether, was a favourite exercise of children in the marvellous. Forty at least might have been seen at these times in the large room, forming a ring round the margin of the great sixteen-legged oak table, like the monolithic circle at Stonehenge in its pristine days. Outside and above the forty cups came a circle of forty smoke jets from forty clay pipes; outside the pipes the countenances of the forty church-goers, supported at the back by a circle of forty-chairs.

The conversation was not the conversation of week days, but a thing altogether finer in point and higher in tone. They invariably discussed the sermon, dissecting it, weighing it, as above or below the average—the general tendency being to regard it as a scientific feat or performance which had no relation to their own lives, except as between critics and the thing criticised. The bass-viol player and the clerk usually spoke with more authority than the rest on account of their official connection with the preacher.

Now the King of Prussia was the inn chosen by Henchard as the place for closing his long term of dramless years. He had so timed his entry as to be well established in the large room by the time the forty church-goers entered to their customary cups. The flush upon his face proclaimed at once that the vow of twenty years had lapsed, and the era of recklessness begun anew. He was seated on a small table, drawn up to the side of the massive oak board reserved for the churchmen, a few of whom nodded to him as they took their places and said, "How be ye, Mr. Henchard? Quite a stranger here."

Henchard did not take the trouble to reply for a few moments, and his eyes rested on his stretched-out legs and boots. "Yes," he said at length; "that's true. I've been down in spirit for weeks; some of ye know the cause. I am better now; but not quite serene. I want you fellows of the choir to strike up a tune; and what with that and this brew of Stannidge's I am in hopes of getting altogether out of my minor key."

"With all my heart," said the first fiddle. "We've let back our strings, that's true; but we can soon pull 'em up again. Sound A, neighbours, and give the man a stave."

"I don't care a curse what the words be," said Henchard, "Hymns, ballets, or rantipole rubbish; the Rogue's March or the cherubim's warble—'tis all the same to me if 'tis good harmony, and well put out."

"Well—heh, heh—it may be we can do that, and not a man among us that have sat in the gallery less than twenty year," said the leader of the band. "As 'tis, Sunday, neighbours, suppose we raise the fourth Psa'am, to Samuel Wakely's tune, as improve by me?"

"Hang Samuel Wakely's tune as improved by thee!" said Henchard. "Chuck across one of your psalters—old Wiltshire is the only tune worth singing—the psalm-tune that would make my blood ebb and flo like the sea when I was a steady chap. I'll find some words to fit en." He took one of the psalters, and began turning over the leaves.

Chancing to look out of the window at that moment he saw a flock of people passing by, and perceived them to be the congregation of the upper church, now just dismissed, their sermon having been a longer one than that the lower parish was favoured with. Among the rest of the leading inhabitants walked Mr. Councillor Farfrae, with Lucetta upon his arm, the observed and imitated of all the smaller tradesmen's womankind. Henchard's mouth changed a little, and he continued to turn over the leaves.

"Now, then," he said, "Psalm the Hundred-and-Ninth, to the tune of Wiltshire: verses ten to fifteen. I give ye the words:—

"His seed shall orphans be, his wife
A widow plunged in grief;
His vagrant children beg their bread
Where none can give relief.

"His all-got riches shall be made
To usurers a prey;
The fruit of all his toil shall be
By strangers borne away.

"None shall be found that to his wants
Their mercy will extend,
Or to his helpless orphan seed,
The least assistance lend.

"A swift destruction soon shall seize
On his unhappy race;
And the next age his hated name
Shall utterly deface."

"I know the Psa'am—I know the Psa'am," said the leader hastily; "but I would as lief not sing it. 'Twasn't made for singing. We chose it once when the gipsie's stole the pa'son's mare, thinking to please him, but he were quite upset. Whatever Servant David wer thinking about when he made a Psalm that nobody can sing without disgracing himself, I can't fathom! Now, then, the fourth Psalm, to Samuel Wakely's tune, as improved by me."

"Od seize your sauce—I tell ye to sing the Hundred-and-Ninth, to Wiltshire, and sing it you shall!" roared Henchard. "Not a single one of all the droning crew of ye goes out of this room till that Psalm is sung!" He slipped off the table seized the poker, and going to the door placed his back against it. "Now, then, go ahead, if you don't wish to have your cust pates broken!"

"Don't 'ee, don't 'ee take on so!—As 'tis the Sabbath-day, and 'tis Servant David's words and not ours, perhaps we don't mind for once, hey? said one of the terrified choir, looking round upon the rest. So the instruments were tuned and the comminatory verses sang.

"Thank ye, thank ye," said Henchard in a softened voice, his eyes growing downcast, and his manner that of a man much moved by the strains. "Don't ye blame David," he went on in low tones, shaking his head without raising his eyes. "He knew what he was about when he wrote that. If I could afford it, be hanged if I wouldn't keep a church choir at my own expense to play and sing to me at these low, dark times of my life. But the bitter thing is that when I was rich I didn't need what I could have, and now I be poor I can't have what I need!"

While they paused, Lucetta and Farfrae passed again, this time homeward, it being their custom to take, like others, a short walk out on the highway, and back, between church and tea-time. "There's the man we've been singing about," said Henchard.

The players and singers turned their heads, and saw his meaning.

"Heaven forbid!" said the bass player.

"'Tis the man," repeated Henchard doggedly.

"Then, if I'd known," said the performer on the clarionet solemnly, "that 'twas meant for a living man, nothing should have drawn out of my wyndpipe the breath for that Psalm, so help me!"

"Nor from mine," said the first singer. "But, thought I, as it was made so long ago, and so far away, perhaps there isn't much in it, so I'll oblige a neighbour: for there's nothing to be said against the tune."

"Ah, my boys, you've sung it," cried Henchard, triumphantly. "As for him, it was partly by his songs that he got over me, and heaved me out. . . . I could double him up like that—and yet I don't." He laid the poker across his knee, bent it as if it were a twig, flung it down, and came away from the door.

It was at this time that Elizabeth-Jane, having heard where her stepfather was, entered the room with a pale and agonised countenance. The choir and the rest of the company moved off in accordance with their half-pint regulation. Elizabeth-Jane went up to Henchard, and entreated him to accompany her home.

By this hour the volcanic fires of his nature had burnt down, and having drunk no great quantity as yet, he was inclined to acquiesce. She took his arm, and together they went on. Henchard walked blankly, like a blind man, repeating to himself the last words of the singers:

"And the next age his hated name
Shall utterly deface."

At length he said to her, "I am a man to my word. I have kept my oath for twenty years; and now I can drink with a good conscience. . . . If I don't do for him—well, I am a fearful practical joker when I choose. He has taken away everything from me, and by heavens, if I meet him I won't answer for my deeds!"

These half-uttered words alarmed Elizabeth—all the more by reason of the still determination of Henchard's mien.

"What will you do?" she asked cautiously, while trembling with disquietude, and guessing Henchard's allusion only too well.

Henchard did not answer and they went on till they had reached his cottage. "May I come in?" she said.

"No, no; not to-day," said Henchard; and she went away feeling that to caution Farfrae was almost her duty as it was certainly her strong desire.

As on the Sunday, so on the weekdays, Farfrae and Lucetta might have been seen flitting about the town like two butterflies—or rather like a bee and a butterfly in league for life. She seemed to take no pleasure in going anywhere except in her husband's company; and hence when business would not permit him to waste an afternoon she remained indoors, waiting for the time to pass till his return, her face being visible to Elizabeth Jane from her window aloft. The latter, however, did not say to herself, that Farfrae should be thankful for such devotion, but full of her reading, she cited Rosalind's exclamation: "Mistress, know yourself; down on your knees and thank heaven fasting for a good man's love."

She kept her eye upon Henchard also. One day he answered her inquiry for his health by saying that he could not endure Abel Whittle's pitying eyes upon him while they worked together in the yard. "He is such a fool," said Henchard, "that he can never get out of his mind the time when I was master there."

"I'll come and wimble for you instead of him, if you will allow me," said she. Her motive on going to the yard was to get an opportunity of observing the general position of affairs on Farfrae's premises now that her stepfather was a workman there. Henchard's threats had alrmed her so much that she wished to see his behaviour when the two were face to face.

For two or three days after her arrival Donald did not make any appearance. Then one afternoon, the green door opened, and through came, first Farfrae, and at his heels Lucetta. Donald brought his wife forward without hesitation, it being obvious that he had no suspicion whatever of any antecedents in common between her and the now journey-man hay-trusser.

Henchard did not turn his eyes towards either of the pair, keeping them fixed on the bond he twisted as if that alone absorbed him. A feeling of delicacy, which even prompted Farfrae to avoid anything that might seem like triumphing over a fallen rival, led him to keep away from the hay-barn where Henchard and his daughter were working, and to go on to the corn department. Meanwhile, Lucetta, never having been informed that Henchard had entered her husband's service, rambled straight on to the barn, where she came suddenly upon Henchard, and gave vent to a little "Oh!" which the happy and busy Donald was too far off to hear.

Henchard, with withering humility hat to her as Whittle and the rest had to her as Whittle and the rest had done, to which she breathed a dead-alive "Good afternoon."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am?" said Henchard, as if he had not heard.

"I said good afternoon," she faltered.

"Oh yes, good afternoon, ma'am," he replied, touching his hat again. "I am glad to see you, ma'am." Lucetta looked embarrassed, and Henchard continued: "For we humble workmen here feel it a great honour that a lady should look in and take an interest in us."

She glanced at him entreatingly; the sarcasm was too bitter, too unendurable.

"Can you tell me the time, ma'am?" he asked.

"Yes," she said hastily; "half-past four."

"Thank ye. An hour and a half longer before we are released from work. Ah, ma'am, we of the lower classes know nothing of the gay leisure that such as you enjoy."

As soon as she could do so Lucetta left him, nodded and smiled to Elizabeth-Jane, and joined her husband at the other end of the enclosure, where she could be seen leading him away by the outer gates, so as to avoid passing Henchard again. That she had been taken by surprise was obvious.

The result of this casual rencounter was, that the next morning a note was put into Henchard's hand by the postman.

"Will you, said Lucetta, with as much bitterness as she could put into a small communication, "will you kindly undertake not to speak to me in the biting undertones you used to-day, if I walk through the yard at any time? I bear you no ill-will, and I am only too glad that you should have employment of my dear husband; but in common fairness treat me as his wife, and do not try to make me wretched by covet words. I have committed no crime, and done you no injury."

"Poor fool!" said Henchard with fond savagery, holding out the note. "To know no better than commit herself in writing like this! Why, if I were to show that to her dear husband—pooh!" He threw the letter into the fire.

Lucetta took care not to come again among the hay and corn. She would rather have died than run the risk of encountering Henchard at such close quarters a second time. The gulf between them was growing wider every day. Farfrae was always considerate to his fallen acquaintance; but it was impossible that he should, not by degrees, cease to regard the ex-corn merchant as more than one of his other workmen. Henchard saw this, and concealed his feelings under a cover of stolidity, fortifying his heart by drinking more freely at the King of Prussia every evening.

Often did Elizabeth-Jane, in her endeavours to prevent his taking other liquor, carry tea to him in a little basket at five o'clock. Arriving one day on this errand, she found her stepfather was measuring up clover-seed and rape-seed in the corn-stores on the top floor, and she ascended to him. Each floor had a door opening into the air under a cat-head, from which a chain dangled for hoisting the sacks.

When Elizabeth's head rose through the trap she perceived that the upper door was open, and that her stepfather and Farfrae stood just within it in conversation; Farfrae being nearest the dizzy edge, and Henchard a little way behind. Not to interrupt them she remained on the steps without raising her head any higher. While waiting thus she saw—or fancied she saw, for she had a terror of feeling certain—her stepfather slowly raise his hand to a level behind Farfrae's shoulders, a curious expression taking possession of his face. The young man was quite unconscious of the action, which was so indirect that, if Farfrae had observed it, he might almost have regarded it as an idle outstretching of the arm. But it would have been possible, by a comparatively light touch, to push Farfrae off his balance, and send him head over heels into the air.

Elizabeth felt quite sick at heart on thinking of what this might have meant. As soon as they turned she mechanically took the tea to him, left it, and went away. Reflecting she endeavoured to assure herself that the movement was an idle eccentricity, and no more. Yet, on the other hand, his subordinate position in an establishment where he once had been master might be acting on him like an irritant poison; and she finally resolved to caution Donald.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Next morning, accordingly, she rose at five o'clock, and went into the street. It was not yet light; a dense fog prevailed, and the town was as silent as it was dark. She moved on to the bottom of Corn street, and, knowing his time well, waited only a few minutes before she heard the familiar bang of his door, and then his quick walk towards her. She met him at the point where the last tree of the engirdling avenue flanked the last house in the street.

He could hardly discern her till, glancing inquiringly, he said, "What—Miss Henchard—and are ye up so early?"

She asked him to pardon her for waylaying him at such an unseemly time. "But I am anxious to mention something," she said. "And I wished not to alarm Mrs. Farfrae by calling."

"Yes?" said he, with the cheeriness of a superior. "And what may it be? It's very kind of ye, I'm sure."

She now felt the difficulty of conveying to his mind the exact aspect of possibilities in her own. But she somehow began, and introduced Henchard's name. "I sometimes fear," she said with an effort, "that he may be betrayed into some attempt to—insult you, sir."

"But we are the best of friends."

"Or to play some practical joke upon you, sir. Remember that he has been hardly used."

"But we are quite friendly."

"Or to do something—that would injure you—hurt you—wound you." Every word cost her twice its length of pain. And she could see that Farfrae was still incredulous.

Farfrae, happy, and thinking no evil, persisted in making light of her fears. Thus they parted, and she went homeward, journeymen now being in the street, waggoners going to the harness-makers for articles left to be repaired, farm-horses going to the shoeing-smiths, and the sons of labour being generally on the move. Elizabeth enetred her lodging unhappily, thinking she had done no good, and only made herself appear foolish by her weak note of warning.

But Donald Farfrae was one of those men upon whom an incident is never absolutely lost. The vision of Elizabeth's earnest face in the rimy dawn came back to him several times during the day. Knowing the solidity of her character, he did not treat her hints altogether as idle sounds.

But he did not desist from a kindly scheme on Henchard's account that engaged him just then; and when he met Lawyer Joyce, the town-clerk, later in the day, he spoke of it as if nothing had occurred to damp it.

"About that little seedsman's shop," he said: "the shop overlooking the churchyard, which is to let. It is not for myself I want it; but for our unlucky fellow-townsman, Henchard. It would be a new beginning for him, if a small one; and I have told the Council that I would head a private subscription among them to set him up in it—that I would be fifty pounds, if they would make up the other fifty among them."

"Yes, yes; so I've heard; and there's nothing to say against it for that matter," the town-clerk replied, in his plain, frank way. "But, Farfrae, others see what you don't. Henchard hates ye—ay, hates ye; and 'tis right that you should know it. To my knowledge he was at the King of Prussia last nihgt, saying in public that about you which a man ought not to say about another."

(To be Continued.)

BIGGEST BOY IN THE STATES.

A Lad of Remarkable Stature—Interesting Incidents About Him.

The biggest boy for his age in the United States lives at Oxford, Warren County, N.J. His name is Edward Scharrer, he is 16 years old, and his height is already six feet two and a half inches without his shoes. If he should keep on growing at the ordinary rate from now until he is 21 years old, he would then be over seven feet in height. He himself believes that when he reaches that age he will stand fully seven feet four inches.

It is usually the case when phenomenal growth takes place in childhood that the subject is physically a weakling. The tremendous strain upon the vitality resulting from such unusual growth generally enfeebles the entire system; it amounts to a disease, and is so regarded by physicians.

NEVER KNEW SICKNESS.

Scharrer, however, has never seen a sick day in all his sixteen years. He is as strong and healthy as a young animal, and has an appetite commensurate to his size. Just at present, he weighs 160 pounds, and is gaining at the rate of about a pound a week. He is not at all ill-proportioned, and it is only in the boyishness of his face that his lack of years is noticeable. He has the stride and carriage usual in a man at the age at which such height and weight are not extraordinary.

This phenomenon in the way of growth is the youngest of a family of eight children. Every one of his brothers and sisters are of good height, perfectly formed, bright and healthy. None of them have developed any signs of anything abnormal, and they look upon their big brother with as much astonishment as is felt by strangers.

HIS WORK IS PLAY.

This extraordinary youth is well fitted to perform the work of a stout farm hand in every particular. There is no one in the neighborhood who can beat him pitching hay, and when it comes to breaking a horse, his strength makes him a master hand. In fact, most of the tasks that are considered onerous because of the strength required to perform them are child's play to this overgrown boy.

Even as a baby he was unusually large; by the time he had reached the age of 5 years he was as tall and well formed as the ordinary boy of 8, and at 10 he had attained the growth and the general appearance of a boy of 16.

Mentally, he is all that could be expected of a boy of his age. He is a good student, and has made the most of his rather limited opportunities for education.

The question of a calling in life is not bothering Scharrer at all. He says he was born a farmer, and a farmer he will remain. Nothing else has any attraction for him whatever; he seems to have an inborn love for the soil.

Unless, however, nature presently calls a halt, New Jersey bids fair to furnish the legitimate successor to Chang, the Chinese giant, and the late lamented Captain Bates.

GUN THAT NEEDS NO POWDER.

One of the most remarkable of war inventions is attributed to the ingenuity of a Frenchman, Paul Giffard. His "miracle gun" is a repeating rifle which employs no gunpowder. Liquefied air, obtained under pressure at a temperature hundreds of degrees below zero, and thus representing an enormous expansive power, is the projecting force. This rifle is described as being much lighter in weight than an ordinary rifle. The steel carriage, nine inches long, and as thick as one's thumb, contains 300 bullets, which may be discharged as quickly or as slowly as desired. There is no smoke and no flash, only a sharp and low report. As soon as one cartridge is empty, another can be screwed on instantly, 300 shots costing but two and a half cents.

HONEY FROM APPLES.

In Chile they let nothing in the apple go to waste. There, after making cider and wine from their apples, they extract from the refuse a white and finely flavored spirit, and by another process they procure a sweet treacle, or, as they term it, honey.

HE IS AN INFANT SANDOW

A BABY NINE MONTHS OLD WHO IS A VERITABLE WONDER.

When Nine Months Old Could Lift a Dumbbell Weighing Twenty-five Pounds—His Father Puts Him Through a Regular Course of Training, and His Mother Attends to His Diet.

Here is a nine-months-old Sandow. He is Henry Edward William Ward, the child of Mr. and Mrs. H. D. Ward, of Lewiston, Me. At an early age this miniature giant began to show signs of remarkable strength for an infant. When three months old his weight was twenty pounds, and his parents commenced to notice his unusual development. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Ward are of large proportions, and the rapid way in which their young son took on flesh surprised them.

Mr. Ward, who was something of an athlete in his younger days, thought he saw the foundation for a remarkably strong man in his son, and when he was about three months old adopted a gentle system of exercise, through which he put young Henry every day. He also put his little son on a diet that was muscle producing, and in a few weeks was delighted to notice a great improvement.

Then some light dumbbells were secured for the boy, and under the careful tuition of his father he soon manipulated them surprisingly well. Young Henry's weight was so great for a youth of his age that he did not develop much speed as a sprinter, and his main strength, brought about by dumbbell and Indian club practice, is in his arms and chest. When only nine months old he was able to lift a dumbbell weighing twenty-five pounds clear of the floor.

THE FATHER'S STORY.

Mr. Ward, who has full charge of the athletic training of this youthful Sandow, says:

"My boy is a wonder, and I am willing to back him against all comers of his age. When I first started him in using the dumbbells I was afraid he might hurt himself, but he really seemed to like the exercise, and he was ready to cry when I called time on him. My wife agreed not to meddle with his athletic instructions if I would keep away from his dieting, so she manages that part. After he had been using the bells about a month and I saw the effect was good, I was willing to experiment a little, and I gave him some tests to show his strength.

"When he was five months old I put a bandage around him and held him suspended over a fifteen-pound dumbbell. He grasped it and lifted it clear of the floor, holding it so nearly a minute. This test never tired him in the least. He now, at nine months of age, lifts a twenty-five pound dumbbell, and keeps it in the air a minute, and would do so longer, but I don't want to be too hard on the boy. I don't mean to brag about my son, but I believe he is the coming strong man without any doubt."

THE MOTHER TELLS OF HIS DIET.

"When he was three months old," says Mrs. Ward, who attends to his dieting, "I commenced to feed him on graham crackers soaked in milk. This not only put on flesh rapidly, but also built up his bones and muscles. I am now giving him solid foods of different kinds, and he wants to eat most of the time. Sometimes I have to take him away from the table for fear he will eat too much, and then he is sure to cry."

Mr. Ward is fitting up a model miniature gymnasium for his boy, and he is putting all sorts of appliances to develop muscles of the young wonder. The boy himself is not surprised at anything, and takes his training as a matter of course. He is learning to talk rapidly, and is as bright as a new dollar. Every muscle in the little fellow's body stands out prominently, and his flesh is as hard and firm as a professional boxer's. His biceps are developed in an astonishing manner and feel like iron.

A WOMAN'S MILITARY FUNERAL.

It is very seldom, indeed, that a military display takes place at the funeral of any woman who does not happen to be the member of some reigning family. The honors accorded by the French Government to the late Mme. Charles Heine, whose obsequies at Paris the other day were attended by a battalion of infantry with the regimental colors and band, are sufficiently exceptional to merit record. The troops were present at the funeral ceremonies in consequence of the dead lady having been one of the only two women officers of the National Order of the Legion of Honor, which had been conferred upon her for her boundless charities. The sole feminine officer of the Legion of Honor now surviving is the celebrated artist, Rosa Bonheur, so renowned for her paintings of animals, who received the cross of an ordinary knight from Napoleon III. and the cross of officer of the order from the Government of the republic.

PLAYING IT TO A FINISH.

Two Paris women were recently persuaded by a Spiritualistic medium that their bodies enveloped the spirits of Mary Stuart and Queen Elizabeth. Unfortunately Mary Stuart discovered that Elizabeth's nephew embodied the spirit of Bothwell, and the two, taking all the Virgin Queen's money, eloped, making it necessary for the police to be called in.

CHURCH CATS.

In Naples there exists a race of cats which live in the churches. They are kept and fed by the authorities on purpose to catch the mice which infest all old buildings there. The animals may often be seen walking about among the congregation, or sitting gravely before the altar during time of mass.