AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—(Continued.)

Suddenly the taller members of the crowd turned their heads, and the shorter stood on tip-toe. It was said that the royal cortege approached. Form the background Elizabeth-Jane watched the scene. Some seats had been arranged from which ladies could witness the spectacle, and the front seat was occupied by Lucetta just at present. In the road under her eyes stood Henchard. But he was far from attractive to a woman's eye, ruled as that is so largely by the superficies of things. Everybody else, from the Mayor to the washerwoman, shone in new vesture according to means; but Henchard had doggedly retained the fretted and weather-beaten garments of bygone years.

Hence, alas! this occurred: Lucetta's eyes slid over him to this side and to that without anchoring on a feature—as gaily dressed women's eyes will too often do on such occasions. Her manner signified quite plainly that she meant to know him in public no more.

But she was never tired of watching Donald, as he stood in an animated converse with his friends a few yards off, wearing round his young neck the official gold chain with great square links, like that round the royal unicorn.

At length a man stationed at the farthest turn of the high road, namely, on the second bridge, of which mention has been made, gave a signal; and the Corporation in their robes proceeded from the front of the Town Hall to the archway erected at the entrance to the town. The carriages containing the royal visitor and his suite arrived at the spot in a cloud of dust, a procession was formed, and the whole came on to the Town Hall at a walking pace.

The spot was the centre of interest. There were a few clear yards in front of the royal carriage; and into this space a man stepped before any one could prevent him. It was Henchard. He had unrolled his private flag, and removing his hat he advanced to the side of the slowing vehicle, waving the Union Jack to and fro with his left hand, while he blandly held out his right to the illustrious personage. All the ladies said with bated breath, "Oh, look there!" and Lucetta was ready to faint. Elizabeth-Jane peeped through the shoulders of those in front, saw what it was, and was terrified; and then her interest in the event as a strange phenomenon got the better of her fear.

Farfrae immediately rose to the occasion. He seized Henchard by the shoulder, dragged him back, and told him roughly to be off. Henchard's eyes met his, and Farfrae observed the fierce light in them, despite his excitement and irritation. For a moment Henchard stood his ground rigidly; then by an unaccountable impulse gave way and retired. Farfrae glanced to the ladies' gallery, and saw that his Calphurnia's cheek was pale.

"Why—it is your husband's old patron!" said Mrs. Blowbody, a lady of the neighbourhood, who sat beside Lucetta.

"Patron!" said Donald's wife with quick indignation.

"Do you say the man is an acquaintance of Mr. Farfrae's?" observed Mrs. Bath, the physician's wife, a new-comer to the town, through her recent marriage with the Doctor.

"He works for my husband," said Lucetta.

"Oh—is that all? They have been saying to me that it was through him your husband first got a footing in Casterbridge. What stories people will tell!"

"They will indeed. It was not so at all. Donald's genius would have enabled him to get a footing anywhere, without anybody's help! He would have been just the same if there had been no Henchard in the world."

The inccident had occupied but a few moments, but it was necessarily witnessed by the royal personage, who, however, with practised tact, affected not to have noticed anything unusual He alighted, the Mayor advanced, the address was read, the visitor replied, then said a few words to Farfrae, and shook hands with Lucetta, as the Mayor's wife. The ceremony occupied but a few minutes, and the carriages rattled heavily as Pharaoh's chariots up the straight High Street and out upon the great open road, in continuation of the journey coastward.

In the crowd stood Coney, Buzzford, and Longways. "Some difference between him now and when he sang at the King o' Prussia," said the first. "'Tis wonderful how he could get a lady of her quality to go snacks with him in such quick time."

"True. Yet how folks do worship fine clothes. Now there's a better looking woman than she that nobody notices at all, because she's akin to that mandy fellow Henchard."

"I could worship ye, Buzz, for saying that," remarked Nance Mockridge. "I do like to see the trimming pulled off such Christmas candles. I am quite unequal to the part of villain myself, or I'd gie all my small silver to see that lady toppered. . . . And perhaps I shall soon," she added significantly.

"That's not a noble passion for a woman to keep up," said Longways.

The ideas diffused by the reading of Lucetta's letters at St. Peter's Finger had condensed into a scandal, which was spreading like a miasmatic fog through Mixen Lane, and thence up the back streets of Casterbridge.

The mixed assemblage of idlers known to each other presently fell apart into two bands, by a process of natural selection, the frequenters of St. Peter's finger going off Mixen Lanewards, where most of them lived, while Coney, Buzzford, Longways, and that connection remained in the street.

"You know what's brewing down there, I suppose?" said Buzzford mysteriously to the others.

Coney looked at him. "Not the skimmity-ride?"

Buzzford nodded.

"I have my doubts if it will be carried out," said Longways. "If they are getting it up they are keeping it mighty close."

"I heard they were thinking of it a fortnight ago, at all events."

"If I were sure o't I'd lay information," said Longways emphatically. "'Tis too rough a joke, and apt to wake riots in towns. We know that the Scotchman is a right enough man, and that his lady has been a right enough woman since she came here, and if there was anything wrong about her afore, that's their business, not ours. Suppose we make inquiration into it, Christopher," continued Longways; "and if we find there's really anything in it, drop a letter to them most concerned, and advise 'em to keep out of the way?"

This course was decided on, and the group separated, Buzzford saying to Coney, "Come, my ancient friend; let's move on. There's nothing more to see here."

These well-intentioned ones would have been surprised had they known how ripe the great jocular plot really was. "Yes, to-night," Jopp had said to the Peter's party at the corner of Mixen Lane. "As a wind-up to the Royal visit the hit will be all the more pat by reason of their great elevation to-day."

To him, at least, it was not a joke, but a reprisal.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The proceedings had been brief—too brief—to Lucetta. The shake of the royal hand still lingered in her fingers; and the chit-chat she had overheard, that her husband might possibly receive the honour of knighthood, seemed not the wildest vision; stranger things had occurred to men so good and captivating as her Scotchman was.

After the collison with the Mayof, Henchard had withdrawn behind the ladies' stand; and there he stood regarding with a stare of abstraction the spot on the lappel of his coat where Farfrae's hand had seized it. While pausing in this half-stupefied state the conversation of Lucetta with the other ladies reached his ears; and he distinctly heard her deny him—deny that he had assisted Donald, that he was anything more than a common journeyman.

He moved on homeward, and met Jopp in the archway to the Bull staake. "So you've had a snub," said Jopp.

"And what if I have?" answered Henchard sternly.

"Why, I've had one too, so we are both under the same displeasure." He briefly related his attempt to win Lucetta's intercession.

Henchard merely heard his story, without taking it deeply in. His own relation to Farfrae and Lucetta overshadowed all kindred ones. He went on saying brokenly to himself, "She has supplicated to me in her time; and now her tongue won't own me nor her eyes see me! . . . And he—how angry he looked. He drove me back as if I were a bull breaking fence. . . . I took it like a lamb, for I saw it could not be settled there. He can rub brine on a green wound! . . . But he shall pay for it, and she shall be sorry. It must come to a tussle—face to face; and then we'll see how a coxcomb can front a man!"

Without further reflection, the fallen merchant, bent on some wild purpose, ate a hasty dinner, and went forth to find Farfrae.

The crowds had dispersed. But for the green arches which still stood as they were erected, Casterbridge life had resumed its ordinary shape. Henchard went down Corn Street till he came to Farfrae's house, where he knocked, and left a message that he would be glad to see his employer, at the granaries as soon as he conveniently could come there. Having done this he proceeded round to the back and entered the yard.

Nobody was present, for, as he had been aware, the labourers and carters were enjoying half-holiday on account of the events of the day—though the carters would have to return for a short time later on, to feed and litter down the horses. He had reached the granary steps and was about to ascend, when he said to himself aloud, "I'm stronger than he."

Henchard returned to a shed, where he selected a short piece of rope from several pieces that were lying about, hitching one end of this to a nail he took the other in his right hand and turned himself bodily round, while keeping his left arm against his side; by this contrivance he pinioned the latter effectively. He now went up the ladders to the top floor of the corn-stores.

It was empty, except of a few sacks, and at the farther end was the door often mentioned, opening under the cat-head and chain that hoisted the sacks. He fixed the door open, and looked over the sill. There was a depth of thirty or forty feet to the ground; here was the spot on which he had been standing with Farfrae when Elizabeth-Jane had seen him lift his arm, with many misgivings as to what the movement portended.

He retired a few steps into the loft, and waited. In course of time—he could not say how long—that green door opened and Farfrae came through. He was dressed as if for a journey.

Farfrae came on with one hand in his pocket, and humming a tune in a way which told that the words were most in his mind. They were those of the song he had sung when he arrived years before at the King of Prussia, a poor young man, adventuring for life and fortune, and scarcely knowing whitherward:—

"And here's a hand, my trusty fiere,
And gie's a hand o' thine."

Nothing moved Henchard like an old melody. He sank back. "No; I can't do it!" he gasped. "Why does the infernal fool begin that now!"

At length Farfrae was silent, and Henchard looked out of the loft door. "Will ye come up here?" he said.

"Ay man," said Farfrae. "I couldn't see ye. What's amiss?"

A minute later Henchard heard his feet on the lowest ladder. He heard him land on the first floor, ascend and land on the second, begin the ascent of the third. And then his head rose through the trap behind.

"What are you doing up here at this time?" he asked, coming forward. "Why didn't ye take your holiday like the rest of the men?"

Henchard said nothing; but, going back, he closed the stair hatchway, and stamped upon it so that it went tight into its frame; he next turned to the wondering young man who by this time observed that one of Henchard's arms was bound to his side.

"Now," said Henchard quietly, "we stand face to face—man and man. Your money and your fine wife no longer lift ye above me as they did but now, and my poverty does not press me down."

"What does it all mean?" asked Farfrae simply.

"Wait a bit, my lad. You should have thought twice before you affronted to extremity a man who had nothing to lose. I've borne your rivalry, which ruined me, and your snubbing which humbled me; but your hustling, that disgraced me, I won't stand!"

Farfrae warmed a little at this. "Ye'd no business there," he said.

"As much as ant one among ye. What, you forward stripling, tell a man of my age he'd no business there?"

"You insulted Royalty, Henchard; and 'twas my duty, as the chief magistrate, to stop you."

"Royalty be---," said Henchard. "I am as loyal as you, come to that."

"I am not here to argue. Wait till you are cool, wait till you are cool, and you will see things as I do."

"You may be the one to cool first," said Henchard grimly. "Now, this is the case. Here be we, in this four-square loft, to finish out that little wrestle you began this morning. There's the door, forty foot above ground. One of us two puts the other out by that door—the master stays inside. If he likes he may go down afterwards and give the alarm that the other has fallen out by accident—or he may tell the truth, that's his business. As the strongest man I've tied one arm to take no advantage of ye. D'ye understand? Then here's at ye!"

There was no time for Farfrae to do aught but one thing, to close with Henchard, for the latter had come on at once. It was a wrestling match, the object of each being to give his antagonist a back fall; and on Henchard's part unquestionably that it should be through the door.

At the outset Henchard's hold by his only spare hand, the right, was on the left side of Farfrae's collar, which he firmly grappled, the latter holding Henchard by his collar with the contrary hand. With his right he endeavoured to get hold of his antagonist's left arm, which, however, he could not do, so adroitly did Henchard keep it in the rear as he gazed upon the lowered eyes of his fair and slim antagonist.

Henchard planted the first toe forward, Farfrae crossing him with his; and thus far the struggle had very much the appearance of the ordinary wrestling of those parts. Several minutes were passed by them in this attitude, the pair rocking and writhing like trees in a gale, both preserving an absolute silence. By this time their breathing could be heard. Then Farfrae tried to get hold of the other side of Henchard's collar which was resisted by the larger man exerting all his

As Good as Gold

force in a wrenching movement, and this part of the struggle ended by his forcing Farfrae down on his knees by sheer pressure of one of his muscular arms. Hampered as he was, however, he could not keep him there, and Farfrae finding his feet again the struggle proceeded as before.

By a whirl Henchard brought Donald dangerously near the precipice; seeing his position the Scotchman for the first time locked himself to his adversary, and all the efforts of that infuriated Prince of Darkness—as he might have been called from his appearance just now—were inadequate to lift or loosen Farfrae for a time. By an extraordinary effort he succeeded at last, though not until they had got far back again from the fatal door. In doing so Henchard contrived to turn Farfrae a complete somersault. Had Henchard's other arm been free it would have been all over with Farfrae then. But again he regained his feet, wrenching Henchard's arm considerably, and causing him sharp pain, as could be seen from the twitching of his face. He instantly delivered the younger man an annihilating turn by the left fore-hip, as it used to be expressed, and following up his advantage thrust him towards the door, never loosening his hold till Farfrae's fair head was hanging over the window-sill, and his arm dangling down outside the wall.

"Now," said Henchard between his gasps, "this is the end of what you began this morning. Your life is in my hands."

"Then take it," said Farfrae. "You've wished too long!"

Henchard looked down upon him in silence, and their eyes met. "Oh," Farfrae—that's not true!" he said bitterly. "God is my witness that no man ever loved another as I did thee at one time. . . . And now—though I came here to kill 'ee, I cannot hurt thee! Go and give me in charge—do what you will—I care nothing for what comes of me!"

He withdrew to the back part of the loft, and flung himself into a corner upon some sacks, in the abandonment of remorse. Farfrae regarded him in silence; then went to the hatch and descended through it. Henchard would fain have recalled him; but his tongue failed in its task, and the young man's steps died on his ear.

Here he stayed till the thin shades thickened to opaque obscurity, and the loft door became an oblong of gray light—the only visible shape around. At length he arose, shook the dust from his clothes wearily, felt his way to the hatch, and gropingly descended the steps till he stood in the yard.

"He thought highly of me once," he murmured. "Now he'll hate me and despise me for ever!"

He became possessed by an overpowering wish to see Farfrae again that night, and by some desperate pleading to attempt the well-nigh impossible task of winning pardon for his late mad attack. Farfrae he remembered had gone to the stable and put the horse into the gig; while doing so, Whittle had brought him a letter. Farfrae had then said that he would not go towards Budmouth as he had intended—that he was unexpectedly summoned to Weatherbury, and meant to call at Mellstock on his way thither, that place lying but three or four miles out of his course.

It would therefore be useless to call at Farfrae's house till very late.

There was no help for it but to wait till his return, though waiting was almost torture to his restless and self-accusing soul. He walked about the streets and outskirts of the town, lingering here and there till he reached the stone bridge of which mention has been made, an accustomed halting-place with him now. Here he spent a long time, the purl of waters through the weirs meeting his ear, and the Casterbridge lights glimmering at no great distance off.

While leaning thus upon the parapet, his listless attention was awakened by sounds of an unaccustomed kind from the town quarter. They were a confusion of rhythmical noises, to which the streets added yet more confusion by encumbering them with echoes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

When Farfrae descended out of the loft, breathless from his encounter with Henchard, he paused at the bottom to recover himself. He arrived at the yard with the intention of putting the horse into the gig himself (all the men having a holiday), and driving to a village on the Budmouth Road. Despite the fearful struggle, he decided still to persevere in his journey, so as to recover himself before going indoors and meeting the eyes of Lucetta.

When he was just on the point of driving off, Whittle arrived with a note, badly addressed, and bearing the word "immediate" upon the outside. On opening it he was surprised to see that it was unsigned. It contained a brief request that he would go to Weatherbury that evening about some business which he was conducting there. Farfrae knew nothing that could make it pressing; but as he was bent upon going out he yielded to the anonymous request, particularly as he had a call to make at Mellstock which could be included in the same tour. Thereupon he told Whittle of his change of direction, in words which Henchard had overheard; and set out on his way. Farfrae had not directed his man to take the message indoors, and Whittle had not been supposed to do so on his own responsibility.

Now the anonymous letter was the well-intentioned but clumsy contrivance of Longways and other of Frafrae's men, to get him out of the way for the evening, in order that the satirical mummery should fall flat, if it were attempted. By giving open information they would have brought down upon their heads the vengeance of those among their comrades who enjoyed these boisterous old games; and therefore the plan of sending a letter recommended itself by its indirectness.

It was about eight o'clock, and Lucetta was sitting in the drawing-room alone. She was leaning back in her chair, in a more hopeful mood than she had enjoyed since her marriage. The day had been such a success; and the temporary uneasiness which Henchard's show of effrontery had wrought in her disappeared with the quiet disappearance of Henchard himself under her husband's reproof. The floating evidences of her absurd passion for him, and its consequences, had been destroyed, and she really seemed to have no cause for fear.

The reverie in which these and other subjects mingled was disturbed by a hubbub in the distance, that increased moment by moment. It did not greatly surprise her, the afternoon having been given up to recreation by a majority of the populace since the passage of the royal equipages. But her attention was at once rivetted to the matter by the voice of a maid-servant next door, who spoke from an upper window across the street to some other maid even more elevated than she.

"Which way are they going now?" inquired the first with interest.

"I can't be sure for a moment," said the second, "because of the malter's chimney. "Oh, yes—I can see 'em. Well, I declare, I declare!"

"What, what?" from the first, more enthusiastically.

"They are coming up Corn Street after all! They sit back to back!"

"What—two of 'em—are there two figures?"

"Yes. Two images on a donkey, back to back, their elbows tied to one another's. She's facing the head, and he's facing the tail."

"Is it meant for anybody particular?"

"Well—it may be. The man has got on a blue coat and kerseymere leggings; he has black whiskers, and a reddish face. 'Tis a stuffed figure, with a mask."

The din was increasing now—then it lessened a little.

"There—I sha'n't see, after all!" cried the disappointed first maid.

"They have gone into a back street—that's all," said the one who occupied the enviable position in the attic. "There—now I have got 'em all endways nicely."

"What's the woman like? Just say, and I can tell in a moment if 'tis meant for one I've in mind."

"My—why—'tis dressed just as she was dressed when she sat in the front seat at the time the play-actors came to the Town Hall!"

Lucetta started to her feet; and almost at the instant the door of the room was quickly and softly opened. Elizabeth-Jane advanced into the firelight.

"I have come to see you," she said breathlessly. "I did not stop to knock—foregive me. I see you have not shut your shutters, and the window is open."

Without waiting for Lucetta's reply she crossed quickly to the window, and pulled out one of the shutters. Lucetta glided to her side. "Let it be—hush!" she said peremptorily, in a dry voice, while she seized Elizabeth-Jane by the hand, and held up her finger. Their intercourse had been so low and hurried that not a word had been lost of the conversation without; which had thus proceeded:—

"Her neck is uncovered, and her hair in bands, and her back-comb in place; she's got on a puce silk, and white stockings, and colored shoes."

Again Elizabeth-Jane attempted to close the window; but Lucetta held her by main force.

"'Tis me," she said, with a face pale as death. "A procession—a scandal—an effigy of me, and him!"

(To be Continued.)

ESTIMATING A TREASURE.

So she jilted you after all! said the sympathetic friend.

That is what happened.

And only yesterday you were telling me how lucky you thought yourself. You said the man who got that girl would get a prize.

Well, he will. He'll get a whole lot of prizes. Mine is the seventeenth solitaire engagement ring that I know of.

THEIR KING THEIR HERO

THE GREEKS ALL STAND BY THEIR FORCEFUL SOVEREIGN.

Always Rely Upon Him Instead of Upon Cabinets—Born of Poor Parents, But Luck Came in Leaps and Bounds.

It is common to hear King George of Greece spoken of in Athens, as "the gentleman over at the palace." As that pretentious structure is situated in the centre of the modern city, the remark is generally accompanied by a jerk of the head towards the white walls which show through the dusty trees of the surrounding park. What the "gentleman over at the palace" thinks of things, and what he is going to do, always possesses great interest for the Athenians. They look to him to straighten affairs out when the skein of government gets tangled, as it not infrequently does in Greece.

No constitutional monarch in the world has subjects who lean upon him as much as the Greeks lean upon King George. The politicians may fight bitterly and party feeling may run high, but the people rely for real government, not on the Ministers, but on the King. Whether this feeling of reliance would survive the shock of an unsuccessful war or not is another question, but, as it is now, if the King says war, war it is, and the people are with him.

WHAT THE KING SAYS GOES.

Several times before the Ministers have said war, but the King said peace and peace it was. A few years ago King George astonished Europe by showing what a constitutional monarch really could do in the way of government in an emergency. Tricoupis and Delyannis were fighting each other fiercely. The Cabinet resigned and the King tried in vain to form another. He tried combination Cabinets, straightout Cabinets and all sorts of Cabinets, but the politicians acted like children and "wouldn't play."

At last the King got tired and said he guessed he would get along without a Cabinet for a while. So he did, and Grecian affairs ran along smoothly until the politicians got over their sulks and consented to take office. The people were delighted, for the King formulated no policy, did nothing, in fact, except to do the routine work of all the Ministers and keep the wheels of Government running in routine grooves.

OF POOR BUT HONEST PARENTS.

When King George was born his father was as poor as a church mouse. In 1853, when George was 8 years old, his father became King of Denmark and the family fortunes brightened. Franklin Pierce was inaugurated President of the United States that year, and the following year Perry opened Japan to the commerce of the world. Japan and the royal house of Denmark may be said to have begun their career as factors among civilized nations at the same time. The four eldest children of the newly made King Christian (Frederick, the Crown Prince; Alexandria, now Princess of Wales; William, now King of Greece, and Marie Dagmar, afterwards Empress of Russia) began to "feel their oats" when they realized that their father was a King and that the days of pinching and contriving to keep up appearance was past. But their dear old mother (she was not old then—only 45—when her good fortune came) used to take the children out walking and point out to them the lodging in a cheap quarter of Copenhagen where their father lived when he was a young lieutenant, trying to keep soul, and body together on his meagre pay.

HOW GEORGE BECAME KING.

It was a good object lesson for the youngsters, and they grew up "good people" and married well. When King Otto fled from Greece in 1863 the Powers looked about for a new monarch, and King Christian was not slow to suggest his boy William, then a strapping and remarkably handsome boy of 18, with no bad habits, and with unusual force of character. So the Greeks and the Great Powers sent the youth out to Athens, and Prince William of Denmark became George I., King of the Hellenes.

It was a turbient and disorganized kingdom that the young man came to reign over, and his great barn of a palace was in the midst of a straggling village, which stood where Athens once had been. To-day it is the centre of one of the most beautiful capitals in Europe.

The Greeks wanted their young King to change his religion and be "converted" to the Greek church, but he refused, and remained in the faith in which he was brought up, the Lutheran. When George was 22 years old the "Powers" and the Greeks told him it was time to get married, so he chose for a wife Olga, the daughter of Duke Constantine of Russia, a brother of the Czar Alexander II.

The King's oldest son, the Duke of Sparta, is married to a sister of the German war lord, Sudden William. His second son, Prince George, who has now gone to Crete with the Grecian torpedo fleet, is a young man of great personal courage and large physique. It was Prince George who, when the Czarovitch, now Nicholas II. of Russia, was attacked by a Japanese fanatic, saved the future Emperor's life by seizing the would-be assassin in his vice-like grip.

MADE IT ALL RIGHT.

Do you get into trouble when you go home full?

Yes, but I generally get out by a tight squeeze.

How's that!

I hug my wife.

CONSIDERATE.

Fond Mamma—Why don't you take your dolly with you to the tea party?

Little Dot—I don't fink dolly would like folks to know zat she hasn't anysing but summer clothes.