AS GOOD AS GOLD.

CHAPTER XLIII.

What Henchard saw thus early was, naturally enough, seen at a little later date by other people. That Mr. Farfrae 'walked with that bankrupt Henchard's stepdaughter, of all women,' became a common topic in the town.

Perhaps the only inhabitants to whom this looming choice of the Scotchman's gave unmixed satisfaction were the members of the philosophic party. Mrs. Stannidge, having rolled into the large parlour one evening, and said that it was a wonder such a man as Mr. Farfrae, "a pillow of the town," who might have chosen one of the daughters of the professional men, or private residents, should stoop so low, Coney ventured to disagree with her.

"No, ma'am, no wonder at all. 'Tis she that's a stooping to he—that's my opinion. A widow-man—whose first wife was no credit to him—what is it for a young perusing woman, that's her own mistress and well-liked? But as a neat patching up of things I see much good in it. When a man have put up a tomb of best marble-stone to the other one, as he've done, and weeped his fill, and thought it all over, and said to himself, "T'other took me in; I knew this one first; she's a sensible piece for a partner, and there's no faithful women in high life now;"—well, he may do worse than not take her, if she's tender-inclined."

Not a hint of the matter was thrown out to her step-father by Elizabeth herself or by Farfrae either. Reasoning on the cause of their reticence he concluded that, estimating him by his past, the throbbing pair were afraid to broach the subject, and looked upon him as a lion in the path whom they would be heartily glad to get out of the way. Embittered as he was against society, this moody view of himself took deeper and deeper hold of Henchard, till the daily necessity of facing mankind, and of them particularly Elizabeth-Jane became well-nigh more than he could endure. But what if he were mistaken in his views, and there were no necessity that his own absolute separation from her should be involved in the incident of her marriage?

Elizabeth often took her walks on the Budmouth Road, and Farfrae as often made it convenient to create an accidental meeting with her there.

One day Henchard was at this spot when a masculine figure came along the road from Budmouth and lingered. Applying his telescope to his eye, Henchard expected that Farfrae's features would be disclosed as usual. But the lenses revealed that to-day the man was not Elizabeth-Jane's lover. The face was Newson's. Henchard dropped the glass and for some seconds made no other movement. Newson waited, and Henchard waited—if that could be called a waiting which was a transfixture. But Elizabeth-Jane did not come. Newson did not see anything of her that morning. Waiting in vain he at last retraced his steps, and Henchard felt like a condemned man who has a few hours' respite. When he reached his own house he found her there.

"Oh, father," she said innocently, "I have had a letter—a strange one—not signed. Somebody has asked me to meet him, either on the Budmouth Road at noon to-day, or in the evening at Mr. Farfra's. He says he came to see me some time ago but missed me. I don't understand it; but between you and me I think Donald is at the bottom of the mystery, and that it is a relation of his who wants to pass an opinion on—his choice. But I did not like to go till I had seen you. Shall I go?"

Henchard replied heavily, "Yes; go."

He surprised the young woman, whom he had looked upon as his all in this world, by saying to her, as if he did not care about her more, "I am going to leave Casterbridge, Elizabeth-Jane."

"Leave Casterbridge!" she cried, "and leave—me?"

"Yes, this little shop can be managed by you alone as well as by us both; I don't care about shops and streets and folk—I would rather get into the country by myself, out of sight, and follow my own ways, and leave you to yours."

"I am sorry you have decided on this," she said with difficult firmness. "For I thought it probable—possible—that I might marry Mr. Farfrae some little time hence, and I did not know that you disapproved of the step!"

"I approve of anything you desire to do, Izzy," said Henchard huskily. "If I did not approve, it would be no matter. I wish to go away. My presence might make things awkward in the future; and, in short, it is best that I go."

"Then," she said at last, "you will not be able to come to my wedding; and that is not as it ought to be."

"I don't want to see it—I don't want to see it!" he exclaimed; adding more softly, "but think of me sometimes in your future life—you'll do that, Izzy? think of me when you are living as the wife of the richest, the foremost man in the town, and don't let my sins, when you know them all, cause ye to quite forget that though I loved 'ee late I loved 'ee well."

"It is because of Donald!" she sobbed.

"I don't forbid you to marry him" said Henchard evasively. "Promise not to quite forget me when—" He meant when Newson should come.

She promised mechanically, in her agitation; and the same evening at dusk Henchard left the town, to whose development he had been one of the chief stimulants for many years.

He went secretly and alone, not a soul of the many who had known him being aware of his departure.

He went on till he came to the first milestone, which stood in the bank, half-way up a steep hill. He rested his basket on the top of the stone, placed his elbows on it, and gave way to a convulsive twitch, which was worse than a sob, because it was so hard and so dry.

"If I had only got her with me—if I only had!" he said. "Hard work would be nothing to me then! But that was not to be. I—Cain—go alone as I deserve an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is not greater than I can bear!"

He sternly subdued his anguish, shouldered his basket, and went on.

Elizabeth, in the meantime, had breathed, him a sigh, recovered her equanimity and turned her face to Casterbridge. Before she had reached the first house she was met in her walk by Donald Farfrae. This was evidently not their first meeting that day; they joined hands without ceremony, and Farfrae anxiously asked, "And is he gone—and did you tell him?—I mean of the other matter—not of ours."

"He is gone; and I told him all I know of your friend. Donald who is he?"

"Well, well, dearie; you will know soon about that. And Mr. Henchard will hear of it if he goes not go far."

"He will go far—he's bent upon getting out of sight and sound!"

She walked beside her lover, and when they reached the town pump turned with him into Corn Street, instead of going straight on to her own door. At Farfrae's house they stopped and went in.

Farfrae flung open the door of the ground-floor sitting-room, saying, "There he is waiting for you," and Elizabeth entered. In the arm-chair sat the broad-faced genial man who had called on Henchard on a memorable morning between one and two years before this time, and whom the latter had seen mount the coach and depart within half-an-hour of his arrival. It was Richard Newson.

Newson's pride in what she had grown up to be was more than he could express. He kissed her again and again.

"I've saved you the trouble to come and meet me—ha-ha!" said Newson. "The fact is that Mr. Farfrae here, he said, "Come up and stop with me for a day or two, Captain Newson, and I'll bring her round." "Faith, says I, so I will;" and here I am."

"Well, Henchard is gone," said Farfrae, shutting the door. "He has done it all voluntarily, and, as I gather from Elizabeth-Jane, he has been very nice with her. I was got rather uneasy; but all is as it should be, and we will have no more difficulties at all."

"Now, that's very much as I thought," said Newson, looking into the face of each by turns. "I said to myself, ay, a hundred times, while I've been living on in my Budmouth lodging, and I said it when I sent her without signature a ten-pound note to buy books and clothes; and I have said it when I have tried to get a peep at her unknown to herself—"Depend upon it, 'tis best that I should live on quiet like this till something turns up for the better." I now know you are all right, and what can I wish for more? I should not be happier if I were residing with ye publicly; and Henchard, after all, has more legal claim upon ye."

"You sent that ten pounds?" said she smiling. "Well, I kept it secret, as you requested. But Mr. Henchard wondered about my purchases."

"Well, Captain Newson, I will be glad to see ye here every day now, since it can do no harm," said Farfrae. "And what I've been thinking is, that the wedding may as well be kept under my own roof, the house being large, and you being in lodgings yourself—so that a great deal of trouble and expense would be saved ye—and 'tis a convenience when a couple's married not to hae far to go to get home!"

"With all my heart," said Captain Newson; "since, as ye say, it can do no harm, now poor Henchard's gone; though I wouldn't have done it otherwise, or put myself in his way at all; for I've already in my lifetime been an intruder into his family quite as far as politeness can be expected to put up with. But what do the young woman say herself about it? Elizabeth, my child, come and hearken to what we be talking about, and not bide staring out o' the window as if ye didn't hear."

"Donald and you must settle it," murmured Elizabeth, still keeping up a scrutinizing gaze at some small object in the street.

"Well, then," continued Newson, turning anew to Farfrae with a face expressing thorough entry into the subject, "that's how we'll have. And Mr. Farfrae, as you provide so much, and house room, and all that, I'll do my part in the drinkables."

"Oh, none—we shan't want much of that—oh no!" said Farfrae, shaking his head with respectable gravity. "Do you leave all to me."

When they had gone a little farther in these particulars, Newson, leaning back in his chair and smiling reflectively at the ceiling said, "I've never told ye, or have I, Mr. Farfrae, how Henchard put me off the scent that time?"

He expressed ignorance of what the Captain alluded to.

"Ah, I thought I hadn't. I resolved that I would not, I remember; not to hurt the man's name. But now he's gone I can tell ye. Why, I came to Casterbridge nine or ten months before that day that I found ye out. I had been here twice before then. The first time I passed through the town on my way westward, not knowing Elizabeth lived here. Then hearing at some place—I forget where—that a man of the name of Henchard had been Mayor here, I came back, and called at his house one morning. The joker!—he said Elizabeth-Jane had died years ago."

Elizabeth now gave earnest heed to his story.

"Now, it never crossed my mind that the man was selling me a packet," continued Newson. "And, if you'll believe me, I was that upset, that I went back to the coach that had brought me, and took passage onward without lying in the town half-an-hour. Ha—ha—'twas a good joke and well carried out, and I give the man credit for't!"

Elizabeth-Jane was amazed at the intelligence. "A joke?—Oh, no!" she cried. "Then he kept you from me, father, all those months, when you might have been here?"

The father admitted that such was the case.

"He ought not to have done it!" said Farfrae.

Elizabeth sighed. "I said I would never forget him. But, oh! I think I ought to forget him now!"

"Well, 'twas not ten words that he said, after all," Newson pleaded. "And how could he know that I should be such a simpleton as to believe him? 'Twas as much my fault as his, poor fellow!"

"No," said Elizabeth-Jane firmly, in her revulsion of feeling. "He knew your disposition—you always were so trusting, father; I've heard my mother say so hundreds of times—and he did it to wrong you. After weaning me from you these five years by saying he was my father, he should not have done this."

"Well, well—never mind—it is all over and past," said Newson good-naturedly. "Now, about this wedding again."

CHAPTER XLIV.

Meanwhile, the man of their talk had pursued his solitary way eastward till weariness overtook him, and he looked about for a place of rest. The bright autumn sun shining into his eyes across the stubble awoke him the next morning early. He opened his basket, and ate for his breakfast what he had packed for his supper; and in doing so overhauled the remainder of his kit. Although everything he brought necessitated carriage at his own back, he had secreted among his tools a few of Elizabeth-Jane's cast-off belongings, in the shape of gloves, shoes, a scrap of her handwriting, and the like; and in his pocket he carried a curl of her hair. Having looked at these things he closed them up again, and went onward. It now became apparent that the direction of his journey was Weydon Priors, which he reached on the afternoon of the sixth day.

The renowned hill, whereon the annual fair had been held for so many generations, was now bare of human beings, and almost of aught besides. He deposited his basket upon the turf, and looked about with sad curiosity; till he discovered the road by which his wife and himself and entered on the upland so memorable to both, two or three-and-twenty years before.

"Yes, we came up that way," he said, after ascertaining his bearings. "She was carrying the baby, and I was reading a ballet-sheet. Then we crossed about here—she so sad and weary, and I speaking to her hardly at all, because of my cursed pride, and mortification at being poor. Then we saw the tent—that must have stood more this way." He walked to another spot; it was not really where the tent had stood, but it seemed so to him. "Here we went in, and here we sat down. I faced this way. Then I drank, and committed my crime. It must have been just on that very pixy-ring that she was standing when she said her last words to me before going off with him; I can hear their sound now, and the sound of her sobs: 'Oh, Mike, I've lived with thee all this while, and had nothing but temper. Now I'm no more to 'ee—I'll try my luck elsewhere.'"

And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied five-and-twenty years before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum—which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passia with the departure of zest for doing—stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of a world that had become a mere painted scene to him.

Very often, as he wandered on, he would survey mankind, and say to himself, "Here and everywhere are folk dying before their time like frosted leaves, though wanted by the world, the country, and their own families, as badly as can be; while I, an outcast and an incumbrance, wanted by nobody, I live on, and can't die if I try."

Had he been able to extend his vision through the night shades as far as Casterbridge that evening, Henchard would have seen that the door of his old house was wide open, that the hall was lighted extravagantly, and that people were going up and down the stairs. It was the wedding-day of Elizabeth and Farfrae. Such an innovation on Casterbridge customs as a flitting of bride and bridegroom from the town immediately after the ceremony had not been thought of, and at that hour Mr. and Mrs. Farfrae were entertaining a houseful of guests at their home in Corn Street.

Donald himself was taking a leading part in the festivity, his voice being distinctly audible in the street, giving expression to a song of his native country. Idlers were standing on the pavement in front, and presently it could be perceived that a dance was proposed Mr. and Mrs. Farfrae joining in the figure.

She was in a dress of white silk or satin—the observers were not near enough to say which—snowy white, without a tinge of milk or cream; and the expression of her face was one of nervous pleasure rather than of gaiety. Presently Farfrae came round, his exuberant movement making him conspicuous in a moment. The pair were not dancing together this time, but it was apparent that there was a wordless speech between them; and that whenever the interchanges of the figure made them the partners of a moment their emotions breathed a much subtler essence than at other times.

By degrees the idlers became aware that the measure was also trod by some one who out-Farfraed Farfrae in saltatory intenseness. This was strange, and it was stranger to find that the eclipsing personage was Elizabeth-Jane's partner.

The first time that they saw him he was sweeping grandly round, his head quivering and low down, his legs in the form of an X, and his back towards the door. The next time he came round in the direction, his white waistcoat preceding his face, and his toes preceding his white waistcoat. That happy form was Captain Newson's.

CHAPTER XLV.

It was about a month after the day which closed as in the last chapter. Elizabeth-Jane had grown accustomed to the novelty of her situation, and the only difference between Donald's movements now and formerly was that he hastened indoors rather more quickly after business hours than he had been in the habit of doing for some time.

Newson had stayed in Casterbridge three days after the wedding party, and was stared at and honored as became the returned Crusoe of the hour. On the fourth morning he was discovered climbing a hill, in his craving to get a glimpse of the sea from somewere or other.

The contiguity of salt water proved to be such a necessity of his existence that he preferred Budmouth as a place of residence, notwithstanding the society of his daughter in the other town. Thither he went, and settled in lodgings in a green-shuttered cottage which had a bow-window, jutting out sufficiently to afford glimpses of a vertical strip of blue sea to any one opening the sash, and leaning forward far enough to look through a narrow lane of tall intervening houses.

In exploring her new domain during the first week of residence, Mrs. Elizabeth Farfrae had been reminded often of her stepfather, whose house this of hers had formerly been. He was now homeless—possibly penniless.

From that hour her heart softened towards the self-alienated man; till at length she begged Frafrae to help her in finding out as soon as possible, whether Henchard had banished himself, that she might try to do something to make his life less that of an outsact, and more tolerable to him.

Although Farfrae had never so passionately liked Henchard as Henchard had dliked him, he had, on the other hand, never so passionately hated in the same direction as his former friend had done; and he was therefore not the least indisposed to assist Elizabeth-Jane in her laudable plan.

(To Be Continued.)

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

These Few Paragraphs May Prove Interesting Reading.

Unlicensed dogs are put to death in Larned, Kan., and the owner is fined.

Eating matches are common among the villages of Alaska. He who eats the most is considered the most accomplished man.

The air is so clear and dry in the arctic regions that conversation can be carried on when the speakers are two miles apart.

It is said that William Waldorf Astor owns 4,000 houses in New York City, and that his annual income is nearly $6,000,000.

At Jasper, Fla., a dog chased a rabbit, which dashed into a gopher hole. The dog followed, and a rattlesnake killed both of them.

Spain's agricultural implements are the same as those used in the time of Caesar. This is one reason to account for that country's wretched condition.

An open-top thimble containing a wet sponge, to be used in moistening envelope flaps, and thus facilitating the sealing of letters, is the invention of an Oregonian.

A musician in Hermon, Mo., wanted a tip top zither, and he sent to Europe for one. He was disgusted when he received one that had been in his own State.

Hunters in Kansas earn about $2 a day slaying jack-rabbits. The skins are sold for three cents each to Eastern hatters, who use the hair in the manufacture of soft hats.

Excessive tea drinking shatters the nervous system, weakens the brain, injures the appetite, disturbs the digestive organs, and causes cold feet. So says a New York physician.

A New York barber advertises to teach the tonsorial art in five weeks. He permits the novices to practice on his own face, and is frequently lathered and shaved twenty times a day.

A handsome man in Vanceburg, Ky., thirty-five years of age, has four wives and three families. He was lately divorced from his third spouse, and the next morning was married to the fourth.

A man in Kansas City makes himself square with the world once a year. He burns his account books on the first of January, pays none of his debts due and refuses to collect those that are due him.

After forty years of constant courtship a worthy couple in Trenton, Mo., agreed that it was about time to wed. and they were accordingly made man and wife. They are both over seventy years of age.

A revolving palace, 362 feet high, is planned for the Paris Exposition of 1900. It will be divided into several floors, to be used as restaurants, theatres, etc., and will revolve continuously on a central pivot.

Nicola Tesla, the famous electrician, says that nearly all long-lived people have been great sleepers. He believes that if a man could sleep eighteen hours a day, without the aid of narcotics, he might live 200 years.

Patrick Alliger, an old bachelor, supported himself chiefly by begging in the streets of Dublin. He became ill, and insisted on wearing his wig and a nightcap. After his death the sum of £1,035 in bank-notes was found under his wig.

Coffee derives its name from Kaffa, East Africa, where the berry was first raised. Mocha coffee is so named from a port on the Red Sea, in Arabia, where it was collected and shipped. The first coffee house in England was opened in Oxford in 1651.

In San Francisco there are two rival druggists who occupy opposite corners. Their rivalry is shown even in the sale of postage stamps. One of them has this sign displayed: "Thirteen two-cent stamps for a cent and a quarter." The purchaser soon discovers that the quarter must be of silver.

VENEER USED FOR WRAPPING PURPOSES.

Wood veneer is used to some extent for doing up bundles, instead of paper. Curtain pole manufacturers, for instance, when shipping or delivering poles in small lots wrap them up in veneer. It costs a little more than paper, but not much, and it is much better for the purpose. Poles thus wrapped up are less likely to be creased by the cords tied around them, and the veneer is a better protection from bruises in handling. The veneer used for this purpose is usually of elm wood and made in the same factories where the poles are made. Veneer is also used for wrapping up picture mouldings.

ANCIENT TUMBLERS.

Tumblers of nearly the same shape and dimensions as those employed today have been found in great numbers in Pompeii. They were of gold, silver, glass, agate, marble and other semi-precious stones.

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