

FATE'S INSTRUMENTS.

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued).

Probably Neera exaggerated even the fearless rectitude of Mrs. Bort, but she was so convinced of the nature of the reception which any proposal of the obvious kind would meet with that she made up her mind that her only course was to throw herself on Mrs. Bort's mercy, in case that lady proved deaf to a subtle little proposal which was Neera's first weapon.

So far as Neera knew, Peckton and Manchester were the only places in which George Neston was likely to seek for traces of her. Liverpool, though remote from Peckton, was uncomfortable near Manchester. Every day now had great value. If she could get Mrs. Bort away to some remote spot as soon as might be, she gained no small advantage in her race against time and George Neston.

"If she will only go to Glentarrow, he will never find her."

Glentarrow was the name of a little retreat in remote Scotland, whither Mr. Witt had been wont to betake himself for rest and recreation. It was Neera's now. It was a beautiful place, which was immaterial, and a particularly inaccessible one, which was most material. Would not Mrs. Bort's despot instincts lead her to accept an invitation to rule over Glentarrow? Neera could not afford to pity the hapless wights over whom Mrs. Bort would rule.

Mrs. Bort received Neera in a way most unbecoming to a pensioner. "Well, Nery," she said, "what brings you here? No good, I'll be bound. Where's your mourning?"

Neera said that she thought resignation to Heaven's will not a subject of reproach, and that she came to ask a favor of Mrs. Bort.

"Ay, you come to me when you want something. That's the old story."

Neera remembered that Mrs. Bort had often taken her own view of what the supplicant wanted, and given something quite other than what was asked; but, in spite of this unpromising opening, she persevered, and laid before Mrs. Bort a dazzling picture of the grandeur waiting her at Glentarrow.

"And I shall be so much obliged. Really, I don't know what the servants—the girls, especially—may be doing." "Carriages, you mean?" said Mrs. Bort. "Why don't you go yourself, Nery?"

"Oh, I can't, indeed. I—I must stay in London."

"Nasty, cold, dull little place it sounds," said Mrs. Bort.

"Oh, of course I shall consider all that."

"He—he!" Mrs. Bort sniggered unpleasantly. "So it ain't such a sweet spot, as ye call it, after all."

Neera recovered herself without dignity, and stated that she thought of forty pounds a year and all found.

"Ah, if I knew what you was at, Nery!"

Neera intimated that it was simply a matter of mutual accommodation. "And there's really no time to be lost, she said plaintively. 'I'm being robbed every day.'"

"Widows has hard times," said Mrs. Bort. "And Neera did not think it necessary to say how soon her hard times were coming. After a moment she said, 'Come again to-morrow afternoon, and I'll tell ye,' was Mrs. Bort's ultimatum. And mind you don't get into mischief."

"Why afternoon?" asked Neera. "Cause I'm washing," said Mrs. Bort, snappishly. "That's why."

Neera in vain implored an immediate answer. Mrs. Bort said a day could not matter, and if Neera pressed her further, she should consider it an indication that something was "up," and refuse to go at all. Neera was silenced, and sadly returned to her hotel.

"How I hate that good, good, good man!" she cried. "I'll never see her again as long as I live, after to-morrow. Oh, I should like to hit her!"

The propositions she came upon cause are, as Bacon said, infinite. If Mrs. Bort had not washed in the technical sense of course—on that particular Friday, Neera would have come and gone perhaps even before the train brought George Neston to Liverpool, and his inquiries landed him at Mrs. Bort's abode. As it was, Mrs. Bort's little servant bade him wait in the parlor, as her mistress was talking to a female in the kitchen. The little servant thought "female" the politest possible way of describing any person who was interested in the title to Neera on account of her rustling robes and gold-tipped parasol.

George did not question his informant, thereby showing that he, in the role of detective, was a square peg in a round hole. He heard proceeding from the kitchen a murmur of two subdued voices, one of which, however, dominated the other person's opinion.

"That must be Mrs. Bort," thought he. "I wish I could hear the female."

Then his attention wandered, for he made sure the unknown could not be Neera, as she had had a day's start of him. He did not allow for Mrs. Bort's washing. Suddenly the dominant voice was raised to the pitch of distinctness.

"Have ye told him, it said, 'or have ye lied to him as ye lied to me yesterday?'"

"I didn't—I didn't," was the answer. "You never asked me if I was going to be married."

"Oh, go along! You know I'd have answered that when ye lived with me."

"How's that?" asked George, with a slight smile.

"Have you told him?"

"Told him what?" asked Neera; for it was clearly Neera.

"Told him what's a thief."

"This woman's a brute," thought George.

"Have ye?"

"No, not exactly. How dare you question me?"

"Dare!" said Mrs. Bort; and George knew she was standing with her arms akimbo. "Dare!" she repeated crescendo; and apparently her aspect was threatening, for Neera cried.

"Oh, I didn't mean that. Do let me go."

"Tell the truth, if your tongue'll do it. The truth, will ye?"

"The deuce!" said George, for following on this last speech, he heard a sob.

"No, I haven't. I—oh, do have mercy on me!"

"Mercy! It's not mercy, it's a stick you want. But I'll tell him."

"Oh, stop, for Heaven's sake!"

There was a little scuffle; then the

door flew open, and Mrs. Bort appeared, with Neera clinging helplessly about her knees.

George rose and bowed politely. "I'm afraid I intrude," said he.

"That's easy mended," said Mrs. Bort, with significance.

Neera leapt up on seeing him, and leant breathless against the door, looking like some helpless creature at bay.

"Who let you in?" demanded the lady of the house.

"Your servant."

"I'll let her in," said Mrs. Bort, darkly. "Who are ye?"

George looked at Neera. "My name is Neston," he said blandly.

"Neston?"

"Certainly."

"Then you're in nice time; I wanted you, young man. D'ye see that woman?"

"Certainly; I see Mrs. Witt."

"D'ye know what she is? Time you did, if you're a-going to take her to church."

Neera started.

"Do ye, now? Happen ever to have heard of Peckton?"

Neera buried her face in her hands, and cried.

"Ah, pity you haven't something to cry for! Thought I'd see a sin done for ten pound a month, did ye?"

George interposed; he began to enjoy himself. "Peckton? Oh, yes. The shoes, you mean?"

"A trifle," said George, waving the shoes into limbo.

"Gracious! You ain't in the same line, are you?"

George shook his head.

"Anything else," he asked, still smiling sweetly.

"Only a trifle of forging," said Mrs. Bort. "But 'praps she got her deserts from me over that."

"Forging?" said George. "Oh, ah, yes. You mean about—"

"Her place at Bournmouth? Ah, Nery, don't you ache ye?"

Apparently Neera did. She shivered and moaned.

"But 'praps it," continued Neera; and she bounded across the room to a cupboard. "There, read that."

George took it calmly, but read it with secret eagerness. It was the original character, and stated that Miss Gale began her service in May, not March, 1833.

"I caught her a-copying it and altering dates. My, how I did!"

"Dear, dear, in that case," said Mrs. Bort, "I was afraid it was something new. Anything else, Mrs. Bort?"

Mrs. Bort was beaten.

"Go along," she said. "If you like it, it's nothing to me. But lock up your money-box."

"Let me congratulate you, Mrs. Bort, on having done your duty."

"I'm an honest woman," said Mrs. Bort.

"Yes," answered George, "by the powers you are!" Then, turning to Mrs. Witt, he added, "Shall we go—"

"You'll both of you die on the gallows," said Mrs. Bort.

"Come, Neera," said George.

She took his arm and they went out, George giving the little servant a handsome tip to recompense her for the prospect of being "let in" by her mistress.

George's cab was at the door. He handed Neera in. She was still half-crying and said nothing, except to tell him the name of her hotel. Then he raised his hat, and watched her driven away, wiping his brow with his handkerchief.

"Phew!" said he. "I've done it now—and what an infernal shame it is!"

CHAPTER XII.

It is a notorious fact that men of all ages and conditions quarrel, and quarrel sometimes with violence. Women, also, of a low social grade, are not strangers to discord, and the pen of satire has not spared the tiffs and wrangles that arise between elderly ladies of irreproachable position, and between young ladies of possibly not irreproachable morals. It is harder to believe, but especially for young men whose boards are yet soft upon their chins, that graceful gentle girlhood quarrels too. Nobody would believe it, there were not sisters in the world, but, unappreciated by the natural tendency to suppose that all attributes distinctively earthy are confined to the women sisters, and have no place in the sisters of their friends, a man of reflection, checking his observations, in the various methods suggested by logicians, is forced to conclude that here is another instance of the old truth that a thing is not to be considered non-existent merely because it is not visible to a person who is not meant to see it. This much apology for the incident which follows is felt to be necessary in the interest of the narrator's reputation for realism.

The fact is that there had been what reporters call a "scene" at Mrs. Peckton's. It so fell out that Isabel Bourn, accompanied by Maud Neston, called on Laura to receive congratulations. Laura did her duty, felicitated her friend on Tommy in possession and Tommy's title in reversion, and loyally suppressed her personal opinion on the part these two factors had respectively played in producing the announced result. Her forbearance was ill-requited. Maud, by way of clinching the matter and conclusively demonstrating the satisfactory position of affairs, must needs remark, "And what a lesson it will be for George!"

Laura said nothing.

"Oh, you mustn't say that, dear," objected Isabel. "It's really not right."

"I shall say it," said Maud; "it's so exactly what he deserves, and I know he feels it himself."

"Did he tell you so?" asked Laura, pausing in the act of pouring out tea.

Maud laughed. "Besides, we are not on speaking terms. But Gerald and Mr. Myles both said so."

"Gerald and Mr. Myles?" said Laura. "Please, don't talk about it," interposed Isabel. "What has happened made no difference."

"Why, Isabel, you wouldn't have him after—"

"No," said Isabel; "but perhaps, Maud, I shouldn't have had him before."

"Of course you wouldn't, dear. You saw his true character."

"You never actually refused him, did you?" inquired Laura.

"No, not exactly."

"Then what did you say?"

"What did I say?"

"Yes, when he asked you, you know," said Isabel, with a little smile.

Isabel looked at her suspiciously. "He never did actually ask me," she said, with dignity.

"Oh, I thought you implied—"

"But, of course, she knew he want-

ed to," Maud put in. "Didn't you, dear?"

"Well, I thought so," said Isabel, modestly.

"I know you thought so," said Laura. "Indeed, everybody saw that. Was it very hard to prevent him?"

Isabel's color rose. "I don't know what you mean, Laura," she said.

Laura smiled with an unpleasantness that was quite a victory over nature. "Men sometimes fancy," she remarked, "that girls are rather in a hurry to think they want to propose."

"Laura!" exclaimed Maud.

"They even say that the wish is father to the thought," continued Laura, smiling, but now a little tremulously.

Isabel grew more flushed. "I don't understand you. One would think you meant that I had run after him."

Laura remained silent.

"Everybody knows he was in love with Isabel for years," said Maud, indignantly.

"He was very patient," said Laura.

"I shall not stay here to be insulted. It's quite obvious, Laura, why you say such things."

"I don't say anything. Only—"

"Tell!"

"The next time, you might mention that among the reasons why you refused Mr. Neston was that he never asked you."

"What is it, then?" said Isabel. "Don't you, Maud?"

"Yes," said Maud.

"What is it?" demanded Laura.

"Oh, nothing. Only, I hope—I wish you joy of it."

"If you don't mind a slanderer," added Maud.

"It's not true!" said Laura. "How dare you say it?"

"I shall care, dear, that he doesn't fancy you're in a hurry— What was your phrase?" said Isabel.

"I don't choose to hear a friend run down for nothing," declared Laura.

"A friend? How very chivalrous you are! Come, Maud, dear."

"Good-bye, Laura," said Maud. "I'm sure you'll be sorry when you come to think of it."

"No, I shan't."

"There!" said Isabel. "I do not care to be insulted any more."

The two visitors swept out, and Laura to cry. "I do hate that sort of vulgarity," said she, mopping her eyes. "I don't believe he ever thought—"

Mrs. Peckington entered in urbanely and said, "Isabel pleased with her little man?" she asked. "Why, child, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Laura.

"You're crying."

"No, I'm not. Those girls have been horrid."

"What about?"

"Oh, the engagement, and—"

"And what?"

"And poor Mr. Neston—George Neston."

"Oh, poor George Neston. What did they say?"

Isabel pretended he had been in love with her, and—was in love with her, and that she had refused him.

"Oh, and that made you cry?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, please, mamma!"

Mrs. Peckington smiled. "Stop crying, my dear. It used to suit me, but it doesn't suit you. Stop."

"Come, Neera," said poor Laura, thinking it a little hard that she might not even cry.

"Did you cry before the girls?"

"No," said Laura, with emphasis.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Peckington."

"Now, listen to me. You're never to think of him again—"

"Mamma!"

"Hill tell you."

"A tiresome, meddling fellow. Is your father in, Laura?"

"Yes, dear. Are you going to see him about—"

"Why, you're as bad as Isabel!" said Mrs. Peckington, with feigned severity, disengaging Laura's arm from her neck. "He's never asked you either!"

"The vanity of these children! There let me go; and for goodness' sake, don't be a cry-baby, Laura. Men hate water-bottles."

"I want five minutes, Robert," she said, sitting down.

"What's that?"

"A thousand pounds a minute, my dear," said Mr. Peckington, genially, laying down his pipe and his paper. "What with this strike—"

"Strike?" said Mrs. Peckington with indignation. "Why do you let them strike, Robert?"

"I can't help it. They want more money."

"Senseless! They want to be taught their Catechisms. But I didn't come to talk about that."

"I'm sorry you didn't, my dear. Your views are refreshing."

"Well, what do you fancy in her head about young George Neston?"

"Oh!"

"Oh! doesn't tell me much."

"Well, what do you think about him?"

"He's very excellent young man. Not rich."

"A pauper?"

"No, no, no. If you're satisfied, I am. But hasn't he been making a fool of himself about some woman?"

"Really, Robert, how strangely you express yourself! Suppose you mean about Neera Witt?"

"Yes, that's it. I heard some rumor."

"Heard some rumor! Of course you read every word about it, and gossiped over it at the Club and the House. Now haven't you?"

"Perhaps I have," her husband admitted. "I think he's a young fool."

"Am I to consider it an obstacle?"

"Well, what do you think yourself?"

"It's your business. Men know about that sort of thing."

"Is the child—eh?"

"Yes, rather."

"And he?"

"Oh, yes, or will be very soon, when he sees she is."

(To Be Continued.)

SPAIN HAS AN ARBOR DAY.

Spain is waking up to the necessity of re-foresting her mountains. The little King recently went to a village a few miles east of Madrid, and planted a pine sapling, after which 2,000 children, selected from the Madrid schools, each planted a tree. Medals were distributed among them, with the inscription: "First Arbor Day, instituted in the reign of Alfonso XIII, 1896." Similar festivals are to be held yearly in different places, and the children are to be taken out to see how their trees grow, in the hope that they will foster tree-planting in their districts.

WHERE SHE HAD HIM.

He—Wife, there are 1,000,000,000 stars in the sky.

She—Oh, there must be more than that, if you stand out last night till you had counted them.

ROYALTY AND THE WHEEL

CROWNED HEADS MAKE UP BICYCLING PARTIES.

Emperor Nicholas of Russia, William of Germany, King of Portugal, and the Little King of Spain Enjoy the Wheel—Our Beloved Queen Rides in a Wicker Wagon Drawn by Donkeys.

The wheel has many warm devotees among the royal houses of the old world. There was a time when horsetack riding was the sport most enthusiastically followed, but the steel steed has taken the place of the steed of flesh and blood. Horses are now used by the knights and ladies only on the most ceremonious occasions. At other times the bicycle is employed. Bicycling parties are organized by crowned heads, and it is no uncommon thing for a troop of royal personages to make a trip on their wheels. From a reliable source data has been secured showing what members of Europe's royalty ride the wheel. Of the rulers the devotees are Emperor Nicholas II. of Russia; William II. of Germany; King of Portugal, and the little King of Spain.

A QUEEN ON A WHEEL.

For more than a year past the Queen of Italy has ridden a wheel and is now an expert. Owing to her great age the Queen of England is unable to enjoy the sport, and contents herself with a low wicker wagon, which is drawn by donkeys, and which accompanies her on trips to be used whenever she desires a drive. Her family, however, are ardent cyclists. Practically all of the members ride. The Prince of Wales, the Princesses Maud and Victoria, Duke of York, Duchess of Fife, Princess Louise, Marchioness Annonax and Prince Henry of Battenberg sometimes form a pleasant wheeling party in the Royal Preserves of England.

Equally as devoted to the wheel as the family of Queen Victoria is that of the Emperor of all the Russias. The Grand Duke Sergius and Paul, the latter the uncle of the Czar, are fond of wheeling. The Czarovitch often takes long bicycle rides at Turbia. The other members of this family who ride are the Grand Duchess Zenia, the Emperor's eldest sister; Grand Duchess Mecklenburg-Schwerin, daughter of Grand Duke Michael Nicolaevitch and of Princess Cecelia, of Baden, and the Grand Duke Michael Nicolaevitch.

Besides the Emperor, the House of Hohenzollern numbers several bicyclists. His brother, Prince Henry, often enjoys the wheel, and frequently accompanies the Emperor on his trips. The sport is also enjoyed by the Princess Imperial and the Princes Adalbert and Eitel-Fritz.

The entire royal family of Denmark has the cycling craze. Expert riders in this family include the heir to the throne, Prince Christian, his eldest son, Prince Valdemar, who is the husband of Princess Marie d'Orleans, and brother of the Emperor, and the other sons, Prince George and Axel; Princess Ingeborg, who is engaged to Prince Frederick of Schaumburg-Lippe; Prince Charles, the wife of Prince Maud, of Wales, and Prince Harold.

ROYAL GREEK BICYCLERS.

The same interest in cycling evinced by the Royal House of Denmark, is shown by the members of the Grecian King's family. The Crown Prince is a splendid rider, and frequently accompanies his youngest sister, Princess Marie, and Princess George, Christopher, Nicholas and Andrew on a ride. The widow of Prince Rudolph, of Austria, Archduchess Stephanie, daughter of the King of Belgium, is an adept on the wheel. Prince Adolphus, husband of the Princess Louise of Orleans, is Bavaria's knightly representative on the bicycle. Among the royal personages in Germany the wheel holds sway. To its power bow Princess Charlotte of Rouss; Princess Philippine, of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha; Princess Alexandrine, of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, hereditary Princess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and Prince Albert of Slesvig-Holstein. The dowry Duchess of d'Aosta, in Italy, finds pleasure in wheeling. Princess Eulalia, of Orleans, Duchess of Montpensier, of the same country, is equally an enthusiastic bicyclist.

There are other members of the Royal Houses in addition to those mentioned who ride the wheel, or who are taking lessons to keep up with the world on the pace the bicycle has set.

AN HOUR'S STROLL.

Would You Believe That You Can Walk 85,253 Miles an Hour?

Have you ever thought of the distance you travel while you are out on an hour's stroll? Possibly you walk three miles within the hour, but that does not by any means represent the distance you travel. The earth turns on its axis every 24 hours. For the sake of round figures we will call the earth's circumference 24,000 miles, and so you must have traveled during your hour's stroll 1,000 miles in the axial turn of the earth.

But this is not all. The earth makes a journey around the sun every year, and a long but rapid trip it is. The distance of our planet from the sun we will put at 92,000,000 miles. This is the radius of the earth's orbit—half the diameter of the circle, as we call it. The whole diameter is therefore 184,000,000 miles, and the circumference being the diameter multiplied by 3.1418, is about 578,000,000.

This amazing distance the earth travels in its yearly journey, and dividing it by 365 we find the daily speed about 1,580,000. Then, to get the distance you rode around the sun during your hour's walk, divide again by 24, and the result is about 65,000 miles. But this is not the end of your hour's trip. The sun, with its entire brood of planets, is moving in space at the rate of 160,000 miles in a year. This adds to the rate of a little more than 438,000 miles a day, or 18,250 miles an hour.

So, adding your three miles of leg travel to the hour's axial movement of the earth, this to the earth's orbital journey, and that, again, to the earth's excursion with the sun, and you find you have traveled, in the hour, 85,253 miles.

HAD SUFFERED ENOUGH.

Mr. Houlihan—Oh drempert last night that Oi did.

Mrs. Houlihan—An' how long did ye lay in Purgatory? Oi'll be bound to say.

Mr. Houlihan—Divil a minute. St. Peter said