

# THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

## CHAPTER II.

With a sharply indrawn breath, Gerald turned to the table, took up Miss Winchester's letter, and began to unfold it.

"I had almost forgotten it," he said wearily; "but I will read it aloud, for you will be interested in its contents."

"Perhaps there may be some things in it which I should not hear," Lady Bromley gently objected. "If there was any vital secret in connection with your mother's marriage to Mr. Brewster, it may be as well for it to remain such to every one but yourself."

"How thoughtful you always are!" Gerald replied, and bending an appreciative look upon her. "You have always been so good to me I find myself turning to you in every emergency, almost as naturally as I would if you were my mother."

"Thank you, Gerald, for that assurance, and I trust that you will always allow me to act as such in so far as I may. I am sure that our fondness for each other is mutual," responded his companion, with evident emotion.

"Then I shall have no secrets from you," he smilingly returned; "so I will follow my first impulse and read Aunt Honor's letter to you. Sit here," he added, placing a comfortable rocker for her, and then, when she was seated, he brought the dismantled Winchester heirloom and placed it before her.

"Put your feet upon this sacred repository—for as such I shall henceforth regard it—and take your ease. How this poor relic has fretted me every time I have packed my trunk! But now it could not be purchased from me for its weight in gold, and very soon we will have it made over into a fitting ornament for your room."

Then, drawing another chair opposite her, he began to read from Miss Winchester's letter.

"My dear boy," was the tender form of address. "I do not know when, if ever, this will meet your eyes, for I am greatly exercised in my mind as to the wisdom of unraveling for you the mystery which from your birth has enshrouded your life. You are far too young to be told anything about it at present, and yet I am impelled to write out the history of your mother and your origin, together with certain data and events, which may possibly become very valuable to you some time in the future, and would otherwise be utterly lost—swallowed in oblivion by some unforeseen happening to myself. If we should both live until you attain your majority, I should then feel it my duty to tell you everything, and allow you to make such use of your knowledge as you might deem best. If, on the other hand, I should be taken from you before that time, the story would be ready for you, and I should doubtless have warning sufficient to tell you where to find it, together with the record of your birth. I am not your own aunt, Gerald—you are not my brother William's child, as I have allowed you to believe. That was only a harmless fiction, to silence curious questions and gossiping tongues. He was the captain of a sailing-vessel, and died of fever on a homeward passage from South America. Your father also went across the sea, but no one has ever known why he never came back again to his wife. Your mother was Miriam Harris, the only child of my sister, who, against the wishes of her family, married Arthur Harris, a poor but talented musician. Their home was in New Haven, and when Miriam was seventeen years old her mother died very suddenly, of hemorrhage of the lungs. Her death broke her husband's heart, and he never seemed to have any courage to battle with the world afterward, and late the following winter he also passed away, after a brief struggle with that terrible enemy, pneumonia. This left Miriam entirely alone, and I offered her a home with me—I was at that time living in a neighboring town—but for some reason, unknown to me then, she preferred to remain in the city, and continue her music-teaching, which, however, barely gave her a living. She was one of the loveliest girls I ever saw, peculiarly refined in person and man-

ner, and possessing a sweetness of temper that made her irresistible to almost every one. She told me that she should still keep the old home, which greatly astonished and displeased me, for I felt that the rental of it would materially add to her income; while I also felt that it was no right for a girl of her years to live alone. Later, I understood the strange freak and her obstinacy, as I then regarded her decision. The summer following the death of her father, which had occurred early in December, I realized that the girl's own health was failing, and again I urged her to break up housekeeping and come to me. She still refused, and seemed strangely nervous and troubled when I pressed the matter; she even appeared to be restless and uncomfortable during the little visit I was making her, and I accordingly shortened it, returning to my own lonely home earlier than I had intended. I neither heard from nor saw her again until early in winter, when, one cold, stormy day, the child suddenly appeared before me, looking very ill and wretched. I realized at once that she was in no ordinary trouble; but I took her to my heart and bade her confide everything to me. Then I learned the reason of her strange behaviour, and her persistence in living alone in the home that had always been hers. She had been a wife since the month of April previous! A young man—Adam Brewster, by name, and a student at Yale—had been attentive to her some time previous to the death of her father. He had taken lessons on the violin from Professor Harris, as a blind, and for the sole purpose of enabling him to woo and win the heart of his lovely daughter. Mr. Harris did not approve of his attentions, and had openly discouraged them; but, immediately following his death, young Brewster persuaded her to marry him secretly—at least, their relations were to remain a secret only until his college course was ended, which would be the following summer, when he would immediately establish himself in business, and then take her to a home such as he wished her to occupy."

"Oh! how strange!" suddenly broke forth Lady Bromley, in a voice of such intense pain that Gerald turned to her in astonishment.

"I—I mean how strange it is that girls will allow themselves to be drawn into such snares," she hastened to explain, while she struggled to regain her self-control. "Why cannot they have sufficient resolution and moral courage to say 'no'—to be firm to resist temptation, and tell their lovers that when they are ready to give them their rightful place in the world as honored wives, then they will give their hand in marriage? Oh! a secret marriage is a selfish and cowardly thing for any man to urge upon an innocent maiden, and many a one has had her happiness ruined for life by weakly yielding to her lover's persuasions."

"Yes, I believe that is true," said Gerald thoughtfully.

He understood now that her ladyship must have been startled by learning that the circumstances attending the union of his father were so like the experience of her own marriage to Sir Charles Bromley; but he could not quite comprehend, in view of its happy outcome, why she should be so exceedingly bitter against the manner of it.

"Excuse me for interrupting you," she continued, smiling; "I spoke almost before I realized what I was saying."

Gerald turned to his letter and resumed:

"So Miriam trusted him fully; but upon the very day of her husband's graduation, he received a letter from his father, who was a wealthy banker of New York, summoning him immediately home—telling him that his mother, who at that time was in Paris—was on the point of joining a party to Norway, Sweden, and the North Cape, provided she could have a proper escort. The elder Brewster was unable to go himself, but insisted that Adam was to start at once in his place. The trip, he stated, would occupy about three months, and would be a pleasant change for the young man, who for so long had been closely confined to his studies. He also

said that he had already cabled his mother that he would sail on the next steamer, so there was no time to lose. The young husband rebelled outright against this arbitrary command, but more against the prospective separation from his wife; but she, ever generous and considerate of others, advised him to do as his father wished, saying that she would do well enough for the little while that he would be absent—three months would soon slip away, and she would be there in the old home, to welcome him back upon his return. Adam Brewster realized but too well that it would be a very inopportune moment to confess his marriage and plead that he did not want to leave his wife; he was entirely dependent upon his father, and he felt that if he should be thrown upon his own resources, he would have a tough struggle for existence. His plan, so he said, had been to get him to establish him in some paying enterprise, when, once settled upon a firm foundation, he would tell the truth, and introduce his bride. If he hoped to yet carry out this project, he knew he must obey his father, and so he consented to the tour abroad.

"He left a handsome sum with Miriam for her immediate needs, promising to send her more, as he received his own remittances, and forward his address as soon as he knew just what his movements were to be. He said it would be best to still preserve the secret of their relations to each other; but ere the snows of winter fell she would be openly acknowledged before the world." Miriam trusted him implicitly. She promised to do exactly as he wished, and that promise proved fatal to her. It signed her own death-warrant and robbed you of your birthright; for, from the hour of their parting until her dying day, she never heard one word from the man who had pledged himself before God and man to love and cherish her so long as they both should live."

"Oh! how cruel! how cruel!" murmured Lady Bromley sorrowfully, while Gerald gritted his teeth savagely, his face like a mask of chalk, a lurid light in his eyes.

"The poor girl hoped and waited until longer waiting would have compelled her either to betray her secret and produce the proofs of it, or become the target for a scandal-loving public," the young man read on. "She had not confided to her husband the fact that before the anniversary of their marriage should come round she hoped to become a mother. She feared that the knowledge might trouble him during his absence—three months would soon pass away, and her news would safely keep until then."

"This was the sad story she told me when she came to me, that dreary winter day, and asked me to give her food and shelter until she could die and hide in the grave what she had begun to believe was her shame. She would not hear one word against the author of her misery—she still loved him with idolatrous affection, and even though she could not fail to believe herself a deserted wife, yet a lawful wife she was, and she insisted that some undue influence—some treachery on the part of others, was what had caused his unfaithfulness. She commissioned me to have her house sold, and as I was fortunate enough to find a ready purchaser, her disappearance from the place where she had always lived was thus accounted for, and aroused no adverse comment."

"Her baby was born a month or six weeks later, and then I begged Miriam to let me seek her husband, or, in case anything had happened to him, seek his father, produce the proofs of her marriage, and demand that justice and proper recognition be accorded her and her child. But no; she was as firm as a rock—she had promised Adam that their union should remain a secret until he came to claim her and give her her proper place in the world, and she would never break her word. A week later, during one of her violent outbursts of grief, she ruptured a blood-vessel, and I knew that from that hour her doom was sealed—that she would go the same way her mother had gone before her. She, also, appeared to realize this, for as she as the bleeding was stopped she insisted that I should pledge myself to bring up her boy in utter ignorance of his parentage, at least upon his father's side. I was to do the best I could for him, and trust the rest to God—if she added wearily, there is any God. I have often wondered why she did not desert by the proofs of her marriage, and thus preclude the possibility of any future knowledge of it. I have sometimes thought she meant to do so, for she kept them constantly by her, but clung to them as long as possible, vainly hoping that her husband might come before she

died. She passed away suddenly while I was absent from her room only a few minutes, and I found her marriage-certificate and her wedding-ring clasped tightly in her left hand, which was concealed beneath her pillow. I put them both into the envelope containing your baptismal-certificate, Gerald—I had had that rite performed for you unknown to her, and took the responsibility of adding your father's name to the one she had chosen for you—and put them carefully away, feeling that, since she had not destroyed your birthright, a Higher Power had wisely ordered their preservation."

(To be continued.)

## WHITE ANTS REACH ENGLAND

Taken Into the Country in Bunches of Bananas.

The most destructive and voracious insect on earth has obtained a foothold in England.

This is the white ant, against whose ravages scarcely anything but metal and stone is proof. His original home is in South Africa, where he devours a village (of huts) at a meal, and depopulates a district in a day, the inhabitants flying before him as from the plague.

Just how he reached England is somewhat of a mystery, but the most generally received theory is that the banana is responsible. Eggs, brought over in the bunches of fruit, have been hatched out in the underground cellars in London and elsewhere, where much of it is artificially ripened, and the insects, it is averred, have since been disseminated all over the country.

Their most recent exploit was the invasion of Grindon Hall, near Sunderland, the residence of Sir Theodore Duxford. The ant armies swarmed all over the mansion, rendering it well-nigh untenable for human beings. An expert, who was called in, found half a million of them in the greenhouse alone, with countless myriads in other parts of the premises.

The problem now is how to exterminate them, for though this is supposed to have been successfully accomplished in regard to a similar plague of the same insects at Leadgate, Durham, by means of a special toxic solution, similar methods have not been invariably successful elsewhere.

Although nothing official has appeared as yet regarding the invasion, it is known that the Board of Agriculture takes a somewhat serious view of the matter. Indeed, it is fairly self-evident that any great increase in the number of colonies will have to be met by the enforcement of an insect alien act of a similar nature to that which was used so effectively some years ago against the Colorado potato beetle and the Hessian fly.—Pearson's Weekly.

## NICOTINELESS TOBACCO.

Very Popular in France for Smokers with Weak Nerves.

What is known as "nicotineless" tobacco has become within recent years very popular in France, finding favor with smokers who suffer from weak nerves or heart trouble. It does in reality contain some nicotine, but most of the alkaloid has been removed by washing the leaf in water. Druggists were first to take up the idea of preparing such a tobacco, for sale to special customers; but its popularity became so great that the French Government, which monopolizes the tobacco trade in France, adopted the idea and started in to manufacture it on a large scale.

The process described has the disadvantage that, incidentally to the washing, not only the nicotine, but certainly other constituents of the tobacco are lost. It would be much better, of course, if "nicotineless" varieties of the plant could be grown; and of this there seems to be a sure prospect, in view of the success of the experiments in which Government scientists have been engaged. It might be possible indeed, to carry the matter too far. The Sumatra leaf, which is so largely used for wrapping cigars, contains very little nicotine, and has almost no flavor, save a slight bitter taste. Its value, indeed, is largely due to its tastelessness—this being very desirable in a wrapper.

An entire battalion of the German Army is being trained in the use of airships.

There are 762 varieties of Arctic flowers, which have but two colors, white and yellow.

After eating onions a girl should immediately sit down and peruse some work of fiction that is calculated to take her breath away.

## On the Farm

### DIDN'T WANT EDUCATION.

In the great effort that the forces of agricultural education are putting forth in many ways to get farmers to see how and why they should become better farmers the principal reason advanced for the change is larger revenue. But the man who resists this teaching or will have none of it is so blind that he cannot even see the increased profit. One of the men who took a cow census gave the following incident which illustrates how stupidly blind some men are:—

He found a farmer with a herd of sixteen cows, the milk of which he was taking to a creamery. Actually he did not get money enough from his cows to pay for their keeping, and he lost about \$8 a head. Within a quarter of a mile of this man was another farmer, a patron of the same creamery, whose herd of nineteen cows paid a profit above the cost of keeping of \$17 each. The difference between those two men was one man's loss added to the other's profit, or a difference of \$25 a cow for the poor herd. I did all I could to arouse the dull man to a sense of the situation he was in and showed him the figures relating to the more successful farmer. This seemed to anger him and he said it was "all false," and he knew it. So slow and sunken was this man's mind that he had never had a dairy or agricultural paper in his house. That showed clearly the amount of brains he was bringing to bear on his work. He boasted to the census-taker that he had got all he had without any of this "bloomed fool education."

There are plenty of just such men today keeping cows and wondering why they cannot get along better than they do.—Hoard's Dairyman.

### LIVE STOCK NOTES.

Sheep dread hard, cold rains. Not half the farmers of this country give them any shelter from such storms.

If a poultryman has a good strain of a good breed, has a comfortable house for them, and give the proper care, success will surely result. Failures are due to the lack of some or all of the above.

If one seeks a bull for the special purpose of butter making from the heifers raised from him, only such as have been bred for several generations from the best butter cows and bulls selected from such cows will be likely to meet the wants of the breeder. So also if beef or milk for the market is the special object sought.

Why not work the bulls? It is no wonder that bulls so often become vicious. They have nothing to do but to study deviltry. For some inexplicable reason, they are considered too good for any sort of labor. In this age of rapidly doing things, we do not expect to see an increase of the use of oxen on the farm. But we have the bulls, and if working them will make them more harmless, why not put them under the yoke?

The quantity of food required to keep an animal in a healthy state of progression bears a certain ratio to the live weight of the animal; two pounds to two and a half pounds of dry food for each 100 pounds of live weight. Exposure, irritation, and the introduction of large quantities of cold water into the system entail a waste of food. Care should be exercised in the selection of foods, which should contain, as near as possible, the proper quantities of flesh-formers and heat-producers; a large excess of either entails a corresponding loss. It is not sound practice to pass a large quantity of expensive foods through an animal for the purpose of enriching the soil.

### AUSTRALIA'S CLIMATE.

Australia's huge northern territory has a tropical, almost an equatorial climate, and the heat is very enervating to Europeans. Its capital, Palmerston, contains more Chinese than Caucasians. The former are the ruling race and the employers; the whites are the servile and the employed. Large herds of buffaloes roam about the silent plains of this enormous territory, which would be a sportsman's paradise but for the wild natives, who are exceptionally fierce and treacherous and have killed a number of the hunters who came to hunt the buffaloes.