

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER II.—(Continued).

"Ah! then there was a wedding-ring!" interposed Gerald, glancing up from his reading.

He arose and went to the table, where he eagerly looked within the envelope from which he had taken the papers.

Yes, in one corner there was a small, but heavy, band of gold, and upon the inside he found engraved the initials, "A. B. to M. H.," together with a date which corresponded with that upon the certificate—April 10, 18—.

"Surely, everything indicates a bona-fide marriage, and I cannot understand why my mother was deserted in such an apparently heartless manner," he muttered, his face gloomy and overcast; "everything, up to the moment when her husband left her, seemed straightforward and sincere, and it was not like him to basely desert any one like that—least of all a wife whom it cannot be doubted he loved. It is the greatest mystery in the world!"

"It certainly seems so," said Lady Bromley, wiping her eyes, for she had been quietly weeping over the sad story of the poor, wronged young wife.

"And now," continued Gerald, again returning to the manuscript, "I have nearly come to the end of my sorrowful tale. I laid Marian away beside her father and mother, in the old family plot in Ashton, Rhode Island; but I put no stone at her grave—I could ill afford it, for one reason, and I would not record her name there as Miriam Harris. Yet I shall conceal this revelation among other relics in the old mahogany cruet which I have charged you always to keep. I have recorded here that I pledged myself that I would never reveal the secret of your birth; but I made a mental reservation that when you were twenty-one I would confide it to you, with the proofs of your parentage, and you could then act as you thought best about revealing your identity to Adam Brewster, or his family, should any of them be living and known to you at that time. Once, when you were about a year old, I went to New York, and made inquiries about the Brewster family. They were not in the city, and I have never heard anything about them since. Two months ago I brought you here to New York with me, so that you might have the advantage of good schools. I am going to do the very best I can for you, my boy, so that if the time ever comes for you to appear as a Brewster, you will be a credit to your name. Some time I am going to make further inquiries regarding the family."

The letter stopped abruptly here, but was resumed upon another sheet, under a later date:

"I have just come from a visit to Ashton, Rhode Island, where I went to look after the family lot in the cemetery. Sometimes I think I have a trouble which may take me off suddenly, and I wanted to be sure the place was in good order, and to tell the sexton where to lay me when I am carried there. I am rather sorry that I did not put some kind of stone at Miriam's grave; but if you ever find this, you can act your own pleasure about the matter, and perhaps you will also look after the place occasionally, so that it will not look neglected. You have always been a good boy, Gerald—my pride and my blessing, even if I have seemed sharp and reserved with you at times when you have asked questions that were difficult to answer. I hope and pray that you may prosper in life, and have a happier lot than fell to your mother. I may add something more to this, but think it doubtful."

That was all, but the paths of the last few pages had been very touching, and Gerald's voice was husky, his lips tremulous, as he concluded.

"Aunt Honor was a noble woman," he said; "I have never realized how much she must have sacrificed for me until now. I shall go to New Haven to-morrow, and after I have examined those records I will hasten to Ashton, to visit her grave and my mother's, both of which shall no longer remain unmarked. Oh, Lady Bromley! Can all this be true?" he exclaimed, as he refolded those closely-written sheets, "or have I only been dreaming?"

"I believe it is true—of course, it must be true, and henceforth you are Gerald Winchester Brewster," she smilingly replied, and feeling that he would be a noble representative of the family name.

"Not at present," he gravely returned; "not until I have faced John Hubbard in court, and proved my position. Then the world may know the secret of my birth. But," with a deep sigh, "I cannot understand my father's unaccountable desertion of my mother. If I thought it was premeditated, I believe I should be tempted to repudiate him, and refuse to bear his name."

"It certainly is a tantalizing mystery, but I sincerely hope that it will some time be solved to your satisfaction," said his friend earnestly.

"I fear not, but I would give the world, if it was mine, for even a sign that he was true to her," Gerald remarked, and little thinking how soon his wish was to be granted.

CHAPTER III.

The next morning Gerald had a long talk with Mr. Lyttleton, Lady Bromley's brother, by whom he was employed, regarding the astonishing discovery which he had made, and the man at once threw himself, heart and soul, into the work of sifting the matter to the bottom, and, if possible, overthrowing John Hubbard, who, from the first, he had believed to be a scheming scoundrel.

It promised to be a very interesting case, and, like an old war-horse scenting the battle from afar, he became all alert and eager for the fray.

"We will make that rascal squirm in the most lively manner, before we get through with him," he grimly remarked, with an anticipative chuckle, while talking over the modus operandi which he intended to pursue.

"You appear to be very hopeful of the issue," Gerald smilingly observed.

"I only wish I could feel half as sure of winning my sister's case for her," Mr. Lyttleton replied, a frown of annoyance sweeping his brow.

"Have you any news—are there more complications to be met?" the young man questioned.

"No; nothing that really amounts to anything; but the English are so conservative, and, of course, the sympathies of an English jury are likely to be enlisted in the interests of their own countryman. Lady Bromley is an American, and that fact is against her, while the relatives of her husband have the characteristic 'bulldog' grip, and will never let go while there is a foot of ground or an English shilling left to fight for. If there had only been children, everything would easily have been settled at the outset. It's a great pity that Mabel couldn't have given Sir Charles an heir to the estate," Mr. Lyttleton concluded, with a sigh.

The case had been held in litigation so long, and was continually being deferred for what seemed to him no reason whatever, he was becoming somewhat discouraged and growing to fear that his client was being subjected to the "freezing-out process."

"However," he added, brightening after a moment, "we will dive into the case of Brewster vs. Brewster with a right good-will, and we must proceed, forthwith, to gather our facts and evidence. You had better go at once to New Haven, as you have planned, and look up the record of your mother's marriage, which, if found to correspond with the certificate, will greatly strengthen your case. Study carefully the record of marriage intentions, also, for, of course, one will corroborate the other."

So Gerald started immediately for New Haven, where his fair young mother had spent most of her life, and become the heroine of the sad romance which he had learned only the day before.

Upon his arrival, he went directly to the office of the city clerk, where he called for the marriage records of the year which appeared upon the certificate in his possession. When the ponderous book was placed before him, his heart began to quake with the fear that disappointment might be in store for

him, and his search amount to nothing.

Finally he found the date he was looking for, and then slowly scanned the page and the names recorded under it. Suddenly he started, and an expression of mingled astonishment and dismay swept over his features as he read those of Aldren Bronstern and Miriam Harris!

This was like a blow in the face of our hero, and he sat staring blankly at the entry, both color and courage forsaking him for the moment.

"Well, this beats me!" he muttered, a strange sense of defeat stealing over him. "What can it mean? The name on the certificate in my possession is certainly Adam Brewster."

He drew it forth, and proceeded to compare it with the entry before him.

The handwriting was unmistakably the same, both upon the book and the certificate, and yet "Adam Brewster" was inscribed upon the one, and "Aldren Bronstern" upon the other, too plainly to be mistaken.

The latter had a very German look and sound, and it was an inexplicable mystery to him.

He then examined the record of marriage intentions, with the same result—that queer-looking name stared him boldly in the face wherever it had been necessary to enter it.

"It certainly seems as if I am to be handicapped at the very outset," he said to himself gloomily; "no court would ever admit the authenticity of any certificate which I might produce in the face of such counter-evidence as this. But," with a start, "where did John Hubbard find that record of Adam Brewster's marriage to Louisa Simpson? He claimed that they were married on the same day, and in the city of New Haven; if that is so, I ought to find the entry here."

And with this thought in mind he began to run his fingers down the page.

Ah! a few lines below he found it—Adam Brewster to Louisa Simpson, and under the same date.

His heart sank like a lump of lead in his bosom. He could not understand it, and he was bitterly disappointed at this unexpected frustration of all his hopes.

But he made a copy of both entries, and then, with a feeling of deep despondency, left the office, fearing that his journey had been all in vain, and that the puzzle would never be solved.

As we know, it had been his intention to keep on to that little town in Rhode Island where his aunt and mother were buried. He had never visited the place since Miss Winchester's body was taken there for interment, eight years previous, and, after reading her letter, he felt that he owed it to her to heed her wishes regarding the lot in the cemetery.

But now, in view of his disappointment, he had no heart for any other enterprise—he was eager to return directly to New York, to confide the result of his trip to Mr. Lyttleton, and consult with him regarding what step, if any, to take next.

He had even turned his steps toward the station, with this purpose in view, when some inward monitor prompted him to stop and reconsider his determination.

"Since I have come so far on the way, it seems a pity not to keep on," he muttered reflectively; "it will only delay me one day, and I may be tempted to continued procrastination and so neglect my duty altogether. It is selfish of me to think of only my own personal interests—no, I will go on, make arrangements to have the lot well cared for in the future, without dallying over it any longer, and so have my conscience at rest about the matter."

Having arrived at this decision, he resolutely faced about and proceeded to put it into execution.

It was late in the evening when he arrived in the little town of Ashton, which, however, had grown considerably since his last sad visit to the place, and he thought it would be useless to go to the village cemetery before morning.

He made his way to the one small hotel which the town boasted, procured his supper, and then retired, but feeling far more weary than if he had labored all day long in the office—so susceptible is the body to the action of the mind.

He slept heavily, but awakened early, and immediately arose, for he was anxious to get through with his business and return to New York as soon as possible.

It was the month of October. The morning was bright, the air clear and keen, from the slight frost of the night previous, while the foliage everywhere was brilliant with a thousand exquisite tints which made the thrifty little hamlet, nestling so cozily in the shadows of the

many fine old trees that graced its streets, seem like a beautifully illuminated picture.

A brisk walk of ten minutes brought Gerald to the entrance to the cemetery, when, entering, he threaded his way through the various paths, until he finally came in sight of the old Winchester lot.

The moment his glance fell upon it, he stopped short, an exclamation of astonishment bursting involuntarily from him, for it was in the nicest possible order, and showed evidences of thoughtful, even loving, care, and the expenditure of no small amount of money.

It had been nicely graded, and a fine granite border set around it, while, on one side, a small but very tasteful monument of the same stone had been erected.

His first thought, on coming in sight of it, was that he had mistaken the spot; then he knew by the two beautiful willows, which he had so admired eight years ago, and which were the only one in the grounds, that he was right.

(To be Continued.)

MAN HATERS IN ENGLAND.

Would Not Receive Letters With King's Head on Stamp.

There died at Hackney, England, the other day an elderly spinster named Harriet Evans, who possessed the distinction of being probably the bitterest man-hater that ever lived.

So far, indeed, did she carry her detestation of the opposite sex, that she refused to receive letters because the stamps bore the King's head. For the same reason, she would only use coins with Queen Victoria's effigy upon them. All other money she threw into the fire as soon as she received it. She declined to deal at shops where male assistants were employed, and, when advertising for apartments, she invariably stipulated that there should be no man in the house.

The papers alluded to her case as a unique one. But in reality women holding similar views are far from uncommon, although comparatively few carry their man-hating mania to such extreme lengths.

There was, however, a lady who quite recently advertised her abhorrence for the opposite sex by publicly refusing to accept a legacy which had been left her by a male relative. Her servants, too, were all females, including her "coachman," who was, up till the middle of last year, a quite well-known figure in the West End of London. In Bloomsbury, again, there lived, not long ago, a woman shopkeeper, who declined to supply men customers, or, rather, would-be men customers, on any terms whatever. Her establishment was a small one, of the kind usually known as a "general shop," and the eccentric proprietor used to sit in a little parlor in the rear.

If a man, not knowing her rule, entered, repeated knockings on the counter failed to elicit any reply. But to one of her own sex, no matter how uninviting her appearance might be, or how shabby her dress, she was graciousness and punctuality personified.

SCIENCE OF WORN BOOTS.

Cothurnology is Latest Means of Judging Character.

Palms, phrenology graphology and all other methods of judging character seem destined henceforth to take second place to cothurnology—the science of worn boots.

According to a Swiss doctor, worn shoes give far more reliable indications than the lines of the hand, the features of the face, or the style of the handwriting.

If heel and sole of the shoe are equally worn after two months' wear, the wearer is an energetic business man, a trusty employe, or an excellent wife or mother.

If the sole is worn on the outer edge, the wearer has a marked tendency for adventures, or abold, obstinate spirit.

If the wearing is on the inside edge, it is a sign of irresolution and weakness in a man, modesty in a woman.

The inventor of the method has put his views to practical test, and on one occasion, having closely observed a stranger entering his house, noticed that his shoes were worn on the outside edge the tip of the sole being roughened, while the rest was still as good as new. He was convinced that the man before him was a scoundrel, and on the very same day the individual was arrested for theft.

USUALLY.

He who tries to be all things to all men usually ends by being nothing to nobody.

On the Farm

SEEDING FOR OATS.

The quantity of oats to sow per acre must be regulated by conditions. In discussing the question Wallace's Farmer states that early oats having a short grain and hence more grains to the bushel require lighter seeding than the late varieties. If the bushels are determined by weight rather than measure, more bushels are required of well cleaned oats than of oats as they come from the machine. Again, the earlier the seeding, the more seed required, because the less time and opportunity for shooting. Still further, the richer the land the less seed is required because of the greater stooling on account of the more vigorous growth. The poorer the land, the less stooling there will be; hence the larger the amount of seed necessary.

Much also depends on whether the oats are sown with the main object of securing a grain crop, or whether the farmer wants to make sure of a stand of grass and is using the oats for a nurse crop. In the latter case he should sow just enough oats to keep down the weeds. This, again, depends on the cleanness or foulness of the land, and also on its fertility. There are lands in which a bushel to a bushel and a half of oats will keep down weeds. There are other lands in which it will take from two and a half to three bushels.

Once more much depends on whether the oats are drilled or sown broadcast. If the seed bed has been thoroughly and properly prepared, drilling will save half a bushel of seed to the acre, because it puts them in at an even depth and gives all an equal chance to grow. Whereas if they are sown broadcast, there may be weather conditions which will start some of the oats a week ahead of the rest, and these last will have a feeble growth and be overshadowed by the stronger growing.

These are the things which the farmer must consider. No one can advise him. In a general way we would say that from two to three bushels of the earliest oats drilled on well prepared ground will give a satisfactory yield. If we were seeding for grass we would use the smaller amount. If seeding late oats with no question of grass, if they were well cleaned, we would put in from three to three and a half bushels. Sometimes a higher yield is secured by four bushels; but in our judgment the difference is not sufficient to justify such heavy seeding.

ALFALFA POINTERS.

Among things to be avoided, if one expects to succeed with alfalfa says Bulletin No. 305, of the Geneva N. Y. Experimental Station, are wet soil, sour soil, shallow soil, adulterated seed, dodder-infested seed, seed of poor vitality, seed from warmer, irrigated lands, and weed seeds in the soil. Factors that aid in securing good yields are thorough preparation of the soil, usually best begun the year before by planting a cultivated crop to which a liberal application of stable manure is made, and good dodder free seed, usually sown without a nurse crop, and put in after weed seeds have been worked out of soil. In most cases, the use of half a ton to a ton of lime to the acre, and of 200 to 300 pounds to the acre of soil from a successful alfalfa field, will prove profitable, and one or the other often changes a failure to a success.

THE WORLD'S WEALTH.

To possess all the gold in the world would appear, to most people, a terrible burden; but, providing it was sufficiently insured, it would be little or no trouble. A rough estimate places the value of a cubic yard of gold at \$10,000,000; so that all the gold in the world, if melted into ingots, could be contained in a cellar twenty-four feet square and sixteen feet high. All the wealth so far obtained from Australia and California could be comfortably tucked away in your office. All that would be required would be an iron safe nine feet square and nine feet high. To give an idea of how small is the little cube of yellow metal, it may be stated that the gold with which Solomon overlaid the "most holy place"—a room only thirty feet square—amounted to more than \$100,000,000.

Wise men lose a lot of valuable time explaining some of the things they know of other people.