

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE
FUTURE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The key was inserted, turned half-round, and the mystery was instantly solved as that painted iron plate sprang outward from its place.

"Aha! that is indeed a very clever arrangement!" remarked the president, in a tone of satisfaction; "and I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Winchester, for taking the trouble to come to point it out to me!"

"You are very welcome, sir," Gerald courteously replied.

"I wonder if there is anything in the place now?" said the other gentleman curiously.

"I am quite sure there is not," said Gerald. "Mr. Brewster did not mention anything but the two boxes when he commissioned me to come here for them."

"It cannot do any harm to investigate," the banker observed, as he thrust his hand deep into the aperture. "Aha!" he suddenly ejaculated again, in a tone of triumph, when, upon drawing it forth, Gerald espied a small book clasped in his fingers.

Bringing the light to bear upon it, they saw there was a label on the cover.

"Notes of European travel, 18—," the gentleman read aloud. Gerald started violently, the hot color rising over his face.

That was the very year of his mother's marriage.

"May I look at it, sir?" he questioned, with repressed excitement.

"Certainly—certainly," said his companion, as he cheerfully passed it to him.

With a hand that trembled visibly, Gerald opened it and hastily scanned a few pages here and there, his heart beating with great, startled throbs as he read.

"Mr. Bancroft," he at length remarked, "I believe that this little book will prove to be of the most vital importance in the forthcoming contest for the Brewster fortune, and with your permission I will take it to Mr. Lytleton."

"Certainly you have my permission. I have no right whatever to the book, and if there is anything in it that will bring that rascally guardian of the late Mr. Brewster's pretty daughter to justice and give the rightful heirs the property, no one will be more glad than I. I have believed from the first that the man was guilty of the foulest fraud. That was a sad fate the poor little girl met with!" Mr. Bancroft responded.

It had been thought best not to reveal the facts regarding Allison's wonderful escape and recovery until she should appear in court to confront the man who had so deeply wronged her.

The young man then bade the banker good morning, and, with the priceless little book buttoned close against his heart, hurried back to Mr. Lytleton's office.

"What on earth is the matter, Gerald?" that gentleman exclaimed the moment he opened the door; "you look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"I have—a very tangible ghost of the past," said the young man, with repressed excitement. "I believe that I have in my possession all missing links connected with my mother's history, and ample material, as well, to solve the mystery of my father's apparent desertion of her."

And eagerly drawing forth the precious book which had been discovered in the secret vault, he laid it before his friend, and explained where and how he had come by it. "Gerald, if that is the case, you are a lucky fellow," cried Mr. Lytleton, starting up, all on the alert.

"But here," he added, after glancing at the label and passing it back; "you must first read it by yourself—there may be some things in it that no one but yourself should know."

Gerald stood regarding it a moment with an air of indecision. Then he took it mechanically, and, sitting down at his desk, opened it and began to read.

The first entry in the book, which was evidently a diary, had been made on shipboard, and read thus:

"Germanic, 8 p.m., June 28, 18—. Sailed at 12 M., but I am blamed if I like the way in which I have

been hustled off; but father insisted that I must join mother in Paris by the eighth of July, and no other vessel would leave in season. I'm deuced lonesome, in spite of the fact that the governor sent Tom, his valet, along with me—to preserve the importance of the family, I suppose, since we are going to the North Cape with a swell crowd. Bah! I abominate style, and I've no earthly use for a valet. Poor M.! It was tough on both of us, when we had everything planned for such a cozy time all by ourselves. The Germanic is a dandy boat, every convenience, fast sailer, first-class table. The only thing lacking is the heart to enjoy it all; but that I've left behind me."

Every day of the ensuing voyage was noted, various items of interest recorded, the captain, crew, and passengers described, and in almost every entry there was also some allusion to "M.," which plainly revealed a heart hungering for some loved presence.

On the last day at sea there was this record:

"Have written a long letter to my dear girl over yonder, which I shall mail the moment we land; but I feel as if I can hardly wait for the next vessel to arrive, when I shall surely hear from her."

There was nothing of special interest for several pages, until, under date ten days later, in Paris, Gerald read:

"No letter! What can it mean? Tom brought me in a whole pile this morning, but not the one I wished for above all others. Surely M. could not have neglected to write, knowing that I would be wild with anxiety if I did not hear from her by every steamer."

Page after page Gerald turned, searching for these significant allusions to the dear one so reluctantly left behind.

There were various bright and animated accounts of people, places and things. Paris was described in a vivacious way, which betrayed that the writer thoroughly appreciated the gay city and its inhabitants. The affectionate welcome received from his mother and other friends who were to comprise the party which was going to the "land of the midnight sun" was faithfully and vividly recorded; but through all there ran that plaintive note—"No letter from M."

The reader followed the writer through Norway and Sweden, and many other places en route, and his own heart ached in sympathy with that of the impatient and unwilling tourist, whose hopes were never realized.

It was evident that his anxiety so preyed upon his mind that he was at times really ill on account of it, for mention was frequently made of having been "laid up for a day or two," and also of his mother's annoyance at having her trip interrupted because of it.

Their tour had evidently been extended far beyond the time at first determined upon, for months were passed in traveling from place to place.

Mention was made several times of a determination to break away from the party and go directly home—the "anxiety and suspense were becoming intolerable"; but these resolutions were always apparently overruled by the entreaties or commands of his mother.

At last there came an entry that was almost paralyzing, for it comprised but one word, and was the only one upon the page:

"Dead!"

The next entry was two days later, and read thus:

"Good heavens! How have I lived since receiving those home papers? Who could have sent me that New Haven paper with that paragraph marked? It looks as if some one had discovered our secret, and was flaunting it with cruel spite in my face. Dead! my darling dead! No, no! I cannot—will not believe it. And yet there it is in black and white, and branded on my brain in letters of fire: 'We

learn with deep regret of the recent death, of quick consumption, of Miss Miriam Harris, who was a beautiful and talented young lady, and a resident of this city for many years.' That is all—vague, mysterious, maddening! Where did she die, and when, and who cared for her? There is no date given! I shall go mad! I must go home at once, to learn the truth. Oh, my love! my love!"

The record ended abruptly here, and for upward of six weeks nothing more was written in the diary.

Then the journal was resumed, in London:

"Have been ill for many weeks, and would have been glad if the end had come; but my dreary life seems likely to be prolonged indefinitely. I thank the fates, however, that my mother is at last weary of wandering, and we are to go home some time within the next fortnight."

The next entry of any interest to Gerald was made on shipboard:

"Have been terribly seasick for two days—something unusual for me; but when the body suffers, the heart lets up a little. Went on deck for a while this afternoon, and met a Miss Porter and her sister. The latter's a sweet little blonde who reminds me strongly of M. They are returning from a visit to some friends in England."

Three days afterward occurred this:

"Had an enjoyable promenade on the upper deck with little Miss Porter. She is a very winning little body—she appeared to divine at once that I had some secret sorrow, and her manner was full of a gentle, indescribable sympathy. She makes me think of M. more and more."

There was nothing additional for a couple of weeks, and then there were three or four pages that were full of fire and passion:

"Made a discovery to-day that has almost made a murderer of me, and I must let off steam, or do some desperate deed. I have been hoodwinked for months. I have been the victim of the most diabolical plot that was ever conceived against a human being. My father, by some means unknown to me, discovered the fact of my marriage to M. some time last summer, and, instead of ranting and tearing and denouncing me, he craftily set himself at work to part us, and he succeeded but too well. He planned that trip abroad to Norway, Sweden, and all those other tiresome places for the sole purpose of getting me out of the way, to enable him to mature some scheme to separate me from my darling. Alas! grief and death aided him in this but too effectually; for, of course, she must have grieved herself to death over the belief that I had cruelly deserted her."

"The cat was let out of the bag in a strange way. I wanted Tom to do an errand for me this morning and when he did not answer the bell I set about hunting him up. I found him in his own room, overhauling his trunk. He had just turned it upside down as I entered, and among a lot of rubbish I espied a letter that had a familiar look. I captured it. It was one that I had given him to mail to M. when I first reached London. I pounced upon him like a cat upon a mouse, and demanded the meaning of it. At first he swore that it must have got into his trunk by mistake. But my suspicions being aroused frightened the fellow almost to death, and he confessed that, by my father's orders, he had intercepted every letter addressed to New Haven. He could easily do this, as it had always been his duty to attend to the mailing of all letters, as well as to the collecting of them, wherever we went."

"Having gleaned that much from him, I went downstairs and faced my father, and we had it out between us, hot and heavy. He saw that the truth must come, and he concealed nothing. He had heard of my attentions to M. while I was in college, and he commissioned some one to watch me; but it was only when I was on the point of graduating that he learned that I was actually married to her. He was in a terrible rage at first; he could not endure the scandal of such a misalliance, for he at once set his wits to work to find some way for me out of the scrape. Hence his plot and his orders to go abroad. Tom, the valet, was sent along to act, with my mother, as a spy, and with instructions to intercept every letter that was mailed to or sent from New Haven. This he felt sure would result in making M. feel that she had been deserted in cold blood if kept up long

enough, and so he rested and left matters to take their own course for a while.

"At length he thought the time ripe for action, and he went to see her and try to browbeat her into suing for a divorce upon the ground of desertion. But she had disappeared from New Haven, and no one could tell him anything about her. Later he received a paper from his spy in New Haven, and found, to his great relief, that it contained a notice of M.'s death. That settled everything. I was free, and there was no further need of making excuses to keep me abroad. The same mail that bore that fatal paper to me contained a letter to my mother bidding her come home, a summons which she would gladly have obeyed immediately, but for my long illness. This is the cursed story which I wrung from my father. When it was finished I left the house in a white heat of passion, swearing that I would never enter it again."

Two days later:

"Have been to New Haven to seek some tidings of my dear one. Could get no trace of her. She left the little house on — Street some time during the winter. The place was sold shortly after, and nothing was ever known of her afterward, except the fact of her death. Then I went to Ashton, a little town in Rhode Island, where I knew her parents were buried. Ah, me! There I found a new-made grave, which told its own sad story. My heart was torn asunder again, and I came away without asking a single question. Am sorry now, though, that I did not hunt up the sexton and get the date of her death and burial, but that I can do later."

Two months after, and written at the Parker House, Boston, Mass.:

"Came to Boston on the tenth to attend the wedding of an old chum. Met the Porter sisters again. Miss Alice, strangely enough, was a bridesmaid. She is really a charming girl, and has promised to correspond with me."

There were various entries after this, but nothing of especial importance until at the end of three months, when the following was written:

"The governor died this morning; sent for me last night, and begged my forgiveness for the wrong done me. I tried to be kind, but in my heart I could not forgive him; but I promised him that I would always care for my mother. He has left everything to me, and I am to carry on the banking business just the same as he had done for the last twenty years."

There was very little more relating to Gerald's mother, although the diary was continued irregularly for more than a year. Then there was a skip of nearly two years before another date was added, and that was the last record in the book:

"To-morrow I am going to marry lovely Alice Porter. She is very like my lost one, and I have grown very fond of her. I have never told her of my marriage, and I never shall. It is an episode in my life which I believe no one else living knows anything about. Life once more looks very inviting to me, and I will try to atone by my devotion to Alice for the great mistake which I made three years ago. Secret marriages are a device of his satanic majesty to trap the unwary and ruin the lives of innocent girls. Now, good-bye, my companion of many sorrowful hours! I should never have had you but for my promise to M. to keep a diary while I was abroad. I shall never talk to you again, for I am going to burn you as soon as the fire is lighted in my office in the morning, and so end forever the first volume of my life, which no one must ever read. I trust the sequel will bring me happier days."

(To be continued.)

LIVED 94 YEARS IN ONE HOUSE

The death has occurred at Braunton at the age of 94 of G. P. Hartnoll, who had been church warden of St. Brannock's Church, Braunton, for fifty years. He was born in the house in which he died and had only slept away two nights during the whole of his life.

A loafer may make a hit with some people, but he doesn't get paid for it. Like Britain's island lies our steak, A sea of gravy bounds it; Shallots confusedly scattered make The rockwork that surrounds it.

On the Farm

FEED FOR PIGS.

In Bulletin No. 73 of the Montana Experimental Station, Dr. Lindfield gives the results of several interesting experiments in pig-feeding. This bulletin is summarized as follows:

(1) Experiments 2 and 6 are illustrations of the economy of feeding young pigs, when they receive the proper ration. In experiment 2, pigs averaging 35 pounds in live weight gained an average of 1.2 pounds per day, and put the one pound of gain at a food cost of 3.5 cents. In experiment 6 pigs averaging 40 pounds gained .92 pounds per day, at an average cost of 3.62 cents per pound.

(2) Peas make a more efficient hog feed than does barley, but because of the greater cost of the peas the barley makes a more economical ration.

(3) A ration of gain, with skim milk as a supplemental food when fed to hogs gave: First the most rapid gains, and second, the most economical gains, but took second place to tankage as an efficient ration.

(4) A ration of gain with tankage as a supplement food came second in rate of gain, but first in efficiency ration. Because of the high cost of tankage, it makes an expensive ration when fed in the proportions given in these tests.

(5) Roots as a supplement food also make a valuable addition to the ration, coming next in value to skim milk and tankage.

(6) Clover or alfalfa fed as hogs will eat it, together with a grain ration, improves materially the rapidity of the gain and the feeding.

(7) In these tests the hogs fed grain alone made economic gains but the lowest daily gains, and on the average the most expensive gains were made on such a ration.

(8) Hogs fed a half grain ration on clover and half alfalfa pasture made, in proportion to the grain fed, much faster gains, and much more economic gains than those fed a full grain ration.

(9) The central thought in these tests is that some supplement food is necessary in feeding a grain ration to hogs if the most rapid economic gains are to be had.

For conditions in Montana the value of the supplement food is: First, skim milk; second roots; third tankage; fourth pasture; fifth, clover and alfalfa.

THE USE OF HEN MANURE.

The following suggestions concerning the use of hen manure are worth consideration at this season by all so fortunate as to have a supply of this valuable fertilizer:

There are two general methods of using hen manure—one is to put it on grass land as soon as it is taken from the house, the other to mix it with chemicals into a fertilizer. Some also use hen manure for corn and potatoes by scattering it in the hill or drill when planting. Such men probably claim that the increased labor and cost of mixing the fertilizer would not pay them. Another class of farmers claim that this mixing is very profitable. They keep the manure in a dry place through the winter. By dusting plaster or "floats" under the roots and in the shed the manure is kept in hard, dry chunks. Early in spring this manure is crushed as fine as possible. This is usually done by spreading it on a hard floor, smashing it with a heavy spade or maul and sifting it through a coarse sieve. Just before planting a mixture about like the following is made; 900 pounds sifted hen manure, 150 pounds nitrate of soda, 750 pounds acid phosphate and 300 pounds sulphate of potash. In some cases 250 pounds of fine bone are used in place of an equal weight of the acid phosphate. This combination has given good results as a potato fertilizer.

LIVE STOCK NOTES.

It takes as much judgment to buy stock to feed the butchers as it does to purchase a stock of merchandise.

It is natural for hogs to root. They find things in the ground that their systems need. Hogs do better when permitted to live naturally.

Do not allow farm stock to tramp around beehives, for they often disturb the bees, and cause them to fill themselves unnecessarily with honey, frequently producing a fatality, and death will be the result.