

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER XXI.—(Cont'd)

Accordingly, that very evening, Allison and Lady Bromley were consulted as to the plan, and both heartily seconded it, greatly to the young lover's gratification, whereupon there followed an earnest consultation regarding ways and means and time.

"How long will it take you ladies to make the necessary arrangements?" the young man inquired.

"That will depend somewhat upon your own and Allison's wishes regarding the matter," Lady Bromley smilingly observed. "Do you want a wedding—I mean a society affair?"

Gerald glanced at Allison, who smiled, flushed, and then shook her pretty head with a somewhat doubtful air.

He understood her. She was not quite sure whether she ought to wish for a brilliant wedding, such as young ladies in her circle usually aspired to. She was no longer Miss Brewster, the heiress, although practically her position was unchanged. Then, Mr. Brewster had been dead only a little over a year, and she was not out of mourning, although gradually lightening the sombre hues which she had hitherto worn. This was something of what he read in her expressive face and hesitation of manner. But knowing how all the fondest hopes of the banker had been centred in this beautiful girl, knowing that he had never denied her a wish from her infancy up, and that he would have spared no effort or expense to make her marriage the one important event in her life, Gerald felt that due respect ought to be paid to what he believed he would have desired, as well as to the expectations of society in general.

"It is customary for the bride to have her say upon a question of that nature, I believe," he smilingly observed, after considering for a few moments; "but if I may be allowed, I would like to express myself freely, and then you can do as you like."

"Certainly you may be allowed, and I am sure that Allison will be glad to know your preference in the matter," said Lady Bromley.

"Indeed, I would," asserted the fair bride-elect eagerly. "I should be glad to shift the responsibility of the whole affair upon his shoulders."

"Well then," returned her lover, his fond eyes fastened upon her face, that he might catch its every varying expression, "I think there ought to be a wedding—not too elaborate an affair, perhaps, because of him whom we lost last year, but as near an approach to a society function, such as he would have desired, as may be consistent."

"Gerald, how thoughtful you are! You always say and do just the nicest and most appropriate things," Allison exclaimed, her face glowing with pleasure, yet with a thrill of emotion in her tones, as her thoughts reverted to her father and how she would miss him in the coming festivities.

"And Allison," he continued, "I want you to be married from your old home, just the same as if everything had remained unchanged. Mr. Lytton thinks we must sail about the middle of April—that will give you fully two months, which ought to be time enough, with sufficient help, to do everything in a proper and becoming manner. My plan is this—to have the old house opened, and you, with Lady Bromley to matronize you, take up your abode there at once. I will advertise for your old housekeeper, Mrs. Pollard, and if she can be found I know that she will be delighted to resume her former position, and will soon have everything in apple-pie order for you. What do you say, dear?"

But Allison could not reply to this. The thought of going back to the dear old home, which she had believed lost to her forever—of planning for her marriage beneath its friendly shelter, and surrounded by familiar and well-beloved objects, around which clustered so many tender memories, aroused emotions which she found it difficult to master. Lady Bromley, seeing how near she was to breaking down, hastened to fill the gap.

"It will be just the nicest ar-

rangement in the world!" she said brightly, "and it is so like you to think of it, Gerald. I am sure, too, that your suggestion with reference to a wedding is the right and proper thing to do—just what your father would have wished, Allison, and I know you will be happy to be at home once more."

"Indeed, yes," was all that the agitated girl could say; but she slipped her hand into Gerald's, at the same time lifting to him a look which told him more plainly than words how grateful she was to have everything so delightfully arranged for her.

Mrs. Pollard was advertised for the very next day, and on the second morning afterward presented herself in Lady Bromley's apartments, where she was almost evercome upon meeting Allison and learning what was wanted of her.

In a week's time the house was in perfect order and everything running as smoothly and methodically as when Mr. Brewster was living, the only thing lacking to make the home life complete being his genial presence. Lady Bromley, however, brightened the home with her charming personality, and, throwing herself vigorously into the work before her, soon had the satisfaction of seeing Allison absorbed in matters pertaining to her trousseau, to the exclusion of all that was sad or depressing.

Gerald established himself in handsome lodgings nearby, where he could drop in upon them whenever he felt inclined, and every passing day only served to make life seem brighter to them all.

At the end of a month cards were issued announcing the approaching marriage, and inviting a long list of friends to be present at the nuptials and reception following.

CHAPTER XXII.

Mrs. Manning and her children, with whom Allison had exchanged frequent visits before leaving Boston, were to spend this last month with her—Mr. Manning coming later in season for the wedding—and Mrs. Bryant was to be the guest of Lady Bromley during the week preceding the event.

Thus time flew, and two days previous to the wedding the house was full of happy, congenial people, all deeply interested in the affairs of the lovely bride-elect, especially in the elegant gifts which had been pouring in thick and fast for more than a week, and in the trousseau, which Gerald had privately instructed Lady Bromley must be the daintiest and nicest which her exquisite taste could suggest. On this particular afternoon, the Lyttons, with Mr. and Mrs. Lyman, had been invited to dine with the family, and after dinner they were all gathered in the drawing-room, a jolly, happy company of twelve, when a maid entered, and, going to Allison, informed her that Mademoiselle Fromonte, the modiste, had arrived with a special reception-dress which had been sent home once before, but had to be taken away again for some alterations. Mademoiselle now wished to try it on, to be sure that it was all right before letting it go out of her hands.

"Ah!" said Lady Bromley, who had overheard the message. "I am glad it has come—now everything is complete. Helen, it is that lovely pearl-gray brocade with the rose trimmings that I was telling you about," she added to Mrs. Bryant.

"Oh, Allison, let me go up with you and see it tried on," said that lady, turning eagerly to her. "I've seen all the rest, you know, but this will have to be packed immediately, and I shall miss it otherwise."

"Why cannot we other ladies have the same privilege?" smilingly inquired Mrs. Lytton. "We all love pretty things."

"So do the gentlemen, also," Mr. Lyman here piped up, whereupon there was a general laugh at his expense.

"Well, well! Mr. Lyman, I am surprised to find a man of your age so fond of girlish finery," merrily cried Lady Bromley, who was excessively amused. "Allison"—turning gaily to her—"there is but one thing for you to do; go up and let Mademoiselle Fromonte put on the

robe, then come down and give us all a look at it."

"And make a show-figure of myself!" protested Allison, blushing.

"Oh, we are all friends, and you are an object of special interest just now. Run along, dear, and let us have our way," said Mrs. Lyman coaxingly.

The fair girl tripped away without more ado, but twenty minutes later the portieres parted again, to reveal a vision of loveliness which brought an exclamation of delight to every lip, a look of fond admiration to every eye.

Mrs. Bryant sprang forward to meet her, clasped her by the hand, and drew her forward to the centre of the room, directly beneath the chandelier, her delighted eyes feasting themselves upon the beauty before her.

But suddenly she stopped short, her figure grew rigid as marble, her face grew pale as death, a wild, frightened look sweeping over her features; then, with a shriek that froze the blood of every listener, she threw up her hands and fell senseless into the arms of Gerald, who sprang forward to catch her.

The whole company was thrown into the greatest excitement by this unexpected and alarming occurrence. Lady Bromley fell upon her knees beside her friend, her face betraying great anxiety and distress.

"What could have caused such an attack?" she murmured apprehensively. "Open the windows, somebody, so that she may have plenty of air."

Mr. Lytton sprang to obey her, and throwing open a sash, the cool evening air swept refreshingly into the apartment, and the unconscious woman began to revive almost immediately. She soon sat up, and looked around the room in search of Allison.

The girl was sitting at the foot of the sofa, and was regarding her guest with an expression of fear and anxiety. It seemed to her that she could not bear to have her wedding marred by a single untoward event.

"Oh, was it all a dream?" cried Mrs. Bryant, trying to rise to her feet as her glance fell upon the young girl.

"Was what a dream, Helen?" inquired Lady Bromley. "What was it that shocked you so?" Why did you faint?"

Mrs. Bryant did not reply. Her attention seemed all concentrated upon Allison, toward whom she tottered weakly, and, bending over her, clutched eagerly at something upon her neck.

"No, no! I did not dream it," she cried, shivering from head to foot. "Mabel! Mabel! Look! look!" and holding up the object which she had seized with one hand, she pointed at it with the other to attract Lady Bromley's attention. It was the golden key which was Allison's only heritage, save that of love.

Around her throat was clasped the delicate chain with the key suspended from it.

Lady Bromley went quickly to Allison to ascertain what had so excited her friend. The effect produced upon her as she caught sight of the golden key was scarcely less remarkable than that exhibited by her friend.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed wildly and with ashen lips, while she grasped Allison by the arm. "Where did you get it?"

The startled heart of the girl leaped into her throat at the question, and she could make no reply. She turned a troubled, appealing look upon Gerald, who instantly came to her side, an eager expression on his face, for he believed they were on the verge of a wonderful revelation.

"Lady Bromley," he observed gravely, "I have told you, and we all know, that Allison was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Brewster when she was an infant. Since we are practically a family-party, I may safely mention the fact that she was a deserted babe, found by Mrs. Brewster's sister. That golden key was pinned upon her dress, and—"

Gerald was suddenly cut short at this point by the strange behavior of Lady Bromley, who fell upon her knees beside Allison, and, winding her arms around her slender, graceful form, bowed her head upon her neck and sobbed brokenly.

"Found! Oh, my darling, I have found you at last! What a blessed release from the cruel bondage in which I have lived all my life! For years I have carried a crushed and bleeding heart in my breast; for almost a quarter of a century I have struggled and fought with a guilty conscience."

She paused, utterly overcome, her tears flowing like rain, while Mrs. Bryant betrayed almost equal emotion. Allison, however, was strangely calm, and her face, though pale, was illumined by some intense inward joy.

"Gerald," she said as she lifted her shining eyes to him, at the same time throwing her right arm around the form of the kneeling, weeping woman, "she is my mother!"

Before the young man could respond, Mr. Lytton came to his sister's side, his countenance wearing a somewhat stern, but wholly puzzled expression.

"Mabel!" he exclaimed somewhat sharply. "What in the name of all that's mysterious is the meaning of this strange scene and your wild utterances? You are conducting yourself in the most unaccountable manner, while there appears to be some important secret which you and Mrs. Bryant share, but which is not apparent to the rest of us. I think you would do well to calm yourself and give us an explanation."

His tone did more toward producing this result than any other treatment could have done.

Lady Bromley immediately arose and turned to confront her brother, but with an air of dignity which at once assured him that whatever the nature of her secret, she had it in her power to explain everything to his entire satisfaction.

She did not move from Allison's side, however. She had clasped one of her hands in hers, and now stood there clinging to it while she replied to Mr. Lytton.

"Richard," she said, meeting his glance calmly, while there was a ring of gladness in her tones which he had not heard in them since her girlhood, "the secret of more than twenty years is a secret no longer. For this dear girl is my daughter!"

"Mabel, are you crazy?" cried the startled man, and regarding her as if he really feared that her reason had suddenly been deranged.

"No. It is apparent that you are thunderstruck at the revelation," she returned, with a nervous laugh, "but what I have told you is true, and Helen can prove the statement."

"But, Mabel, you have always said that you had no children," her brother sternly replied.

"And I spoke no falsehood, for fate and my own unpardonable rashness conspired to rob me of the only treasure that I ever had," said the agitated woman, in a tone of anguish.

"Explain yourself, if you please," commanded Mr. Lytton. "Here take this chair," he added more gently, as he rolled one to her side. "Sit down, everybody, while we have this remarkable denouement elucidated; for"—straightening himself with an energetic movement, a swift look of triumph sweeping over his features—"upon the proof of my sister's assertion there hangs a fortune."

Gerald started violently at his words, and comprehended at once that if it could be proved that Allison was the daughter of Sir Charles and Lady Bromley, there would be no further difficulty about settling the long-contested and complicated "Bromley Case." The appearance of a direct heir was all that was needed to bring it to a speedy issue.

(To be continued.)

YOUR TWO CHARACTERS.

All Greatness of Art Consists in These.

Remember always you have two characters in which all greatness of art consists—first the earnest and intense seizing of natural facts, then the ordering of those facts by strength of human intellect so as to make them for all who look upon them to the utmost serviceable, remarkable and beautiful. And thus great art is nothing else than the type of strong and noble life, for, as the ignoble person in his dealings with all that occurs in the world about him first sees nothing clearly, looks nothing fairly in the face and then allows himself to be swept away by the trampling torrent and unescapable force of the things that he would not foresee and could not understand, so that noble person, looking the facts of the world full in the face and fathoming them with deep faculty, then deals with them in unalarmed intelligence and unhurried strength and becomes, with his human intellect and will, no unconscious or insignificant agent in consummating their good and restraining their evil. — Ruskin.

WELL DONE.

If a thing is worth doing, It is worth doing well; So all of the great poets And philosophers tell.

Now, just jog your memory And upon the past dwell; Whenever you've been done, sir, Haven't you been done well?

He—"Yes, I'm willing to admit that women have much better complexions than men." She—"Naturally." He—"No, artificially."

The Farm

PASTURE FOR PIGS.

The value of pasture for hogs is more generally recognized now than it ever was. Of course, its value per acre depends upon what kind of pasture it is. Clover pasture has been recognized longer as profitable for this purpose than any other kind, but the coming into use more generally of alfalfa in some sections has made it a favorite for hog pasture at certain seasons. Rape is also greatly esteemed for hogs because it grows so rapidly, but it requires more grain feeding with it. Any of these pastures are valuable for hogs, for it makes them very healthful and gives them rapid growth.

Swine feeding upon a pasture probably require more food than do those in yards because more energy is required in grazing than in laying around a yard. But they get more out of the food given them while in pasture than otherwise, because of the nature and likely combinations of the food and the greater activity of the digestive organs brought about by exercise.

The green food increases the digestive capacity of young pigs and puts them in a better condition for later fattening.

Just what a pasture is worth is hard to say though its value per acre is known to equal from 1,500 to 3,000 pounds of feed.

Recent experiments with brood sows on permanent pastures and upon some annual crops is virtually worth from 1,800 to 2,400 pounds of shorts.

LIVE STOCK NOTES.

Begin in October to get the hens in proper condition so that there will be plenty of eggs when they bring from 30 to 40 cents a dozen.

Swine must be given ample exercise and plenty of succulent food if they are to remain healthy and vigorous. A good clover pasture should be provided, followed by peas during midsummer. In the fall rape and clover furnish good pasture. Mature animals not suckling young need nothing in addition to this green food.

To chickens we believe in giving dry grains from the start—pinhead oatmeal, millet, finely cracked corn and wheat. Some fine grit and charcoal should be placed where they can get at it. Whole corn should not be given to chickens until they are quite large; its heating nature makes it likely to ferment in their gizzards, as cornmeal will do, if eaten freely. Wheat is an excellent feed for chickens after they are eight or ten weeks old.

Every horseman knows that not one collar in 100 in daily use is a perfect fit; many will do, but a large majority of them are too wide for the neck and not adapted to the shoulders. Every horse should have his own collar to be able to do his work with comfort, and every collar should be fitted to the horse that is expected to wear it. If the collar is too long it should be cut off at the top; but if too wide and not adapted to the shoulders of the horse, don't think you must get a pad to fill in the space. Pads to the horse's shoulders in summer are about what overshoes would be to our feet—makes them tender and soft instead of firm and tough.

FARM NOTES.

The percentage of fat in cream varies from eight to ten up to six or seven times as much. Good commercial cream should have twenty per cent. or more; anything above 55 is very rich.

It is all right to do all in our power to increase the price of butter and milk, but let us not spend so much time talking about it that we lower the grade of our products. The very best way to bring up the value of an article is to make it so good that everybody will want it.

The cost of plant food depends on two main points; the actual cost, as applied to the soil, and the unavoidable waste through improper mixing of materials. In the common markets, nitrogen costs in one of the best forms (nitrogen of soda) about fifteen cents per pound when delivered on the soil; potash, also, in the best form (German potash salts) costs about five cents per pound, and phosphoric acid, under like conditions (acid phosphate) about five cents per pound. By this is meant that these plant food elements, bought in the form of high-grade chemical fertilizers, would cost as stated.