

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER XXIV.—(Cont'd)

"Oh, that Charlie could have lived till now!" she said, with a sob, as she caught Allison's hand almost passionately to her heart. "My dear! my dear! Can it be that I have found my own at last? Can you open your heart to your mother and try to love her a little at this late day?"

"I love you a great deal already," the beautiful girl replied, as she leaned forward and laid her lips against the soft cheek of the woman beside her. "How could I have been with you all these weeks and not grow fond of you? How perfectly lovely it will be," she added, with a tearful little laugh, as she threw her arms around her neck and drew the stately head down to her. "to have a mother all my very own!"

"And what an exceedingly fortunate circumstance for that same mother to have found her own daughter so opportunely," smilingly remarked Mr. Lyttleton. "I do not believe, my dear girl, that you half-realize that, through this discovery, you will come into an income of some thousands of pounds per annum, and also secure to your mother a very handsome annuity."

"Why, do you mean that this will stop all that litigation in connection with Lady Bromley's property?" cried Allison, astonished.

"I do mean just that. We shall now wind up that matter very shortly, and with very little trouble," the lawyer replied.

"Well, I am sure I do not half-realize it yet," she said, with a long breath. "Gerald," darting a roguish look at him, "do you hear? I'm no longer as poor as a church mouse. Aren't you glad?"

"I do not know that I am especially delighted," he smilingly responded, "but if you are happier I can be contented."

"Do you happen to have anything besides that key in your possession to prove your identity?" Mr. Lyttleton here inquired.

"Yes, indeed, I have. Wait a moment, and I will show you," Allison replied, and starting eagerly to her feet, she flitted from the room before any one could detain her. She soon reappeared with the box in her hands. Putting it into Lady Bromley's hands, she observed:

"You must open it, and when you see what it contains I am sure you will feel that the chain of evidence is complete."

With trembling hands the woman threw back the cover, whereupon Mrs. Bryant came to her side, and both eagerly examined its contents, their tears falling thick and fast as they unfolded the dainty garments, every one of which they instantly identified.

Mr. Lyttleton also stood by, overlooking their movements, and when at length that note which had been found by Miss Nancy Porter pinned upon Allison's blanket was unfolded, he recognized at the first glance the handwriting of his sister's friend, for he had read many a letter which she had penned during the youthful correspondence of the two girls.

This, of itself, proved a great deal, and the careworn look which he had worn so long whenever he thought of the "Bromley Case" disappeared at once and forever from his face.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Miss Allison Brewster Bromley," he jocosely remarked, "in your joy over learning that you have a mother—that henceforth you are the heiress of Bromley Court—I trust you will not entirely overlook the fact that you also have an uncle."

"So I have!" she cried delightedly; "how my blessings are multiplying! Uncle Richard, I—I think the relationship demands ratification."

This was said with such a charming air of archness, accompanied by a blush, while she roguishly put up her red lips to him, that it brought down the house, and the equilibrium of everybody was restored in the general laugh that followed "the ratification."

Of course, there was a great deal to be talked over and many points to be discussed in detail,

and it was late in the evening before the company separated.

Afterward, when Allison and her mother were alone together in the room of the latter, each poured out her heart to the other with a freedom which neither had experienced for years.

Lady Bromley had much to tell of her husband and her home, Allison listening with breathless interest to every word that flowed from her lips. All at once a question suggested itself to her.

"Lady B—," she began. "Allison, my dear!" interposed her companion, a shadow of pain flitting over her face, "cannot you call me by the name which I have so longed to hear all my life?"

"With all my heart, mama," eagerly replied the fair girl, as she lifted the hand she was holding and kissed it lovingly. "Ah! it will be such a blessed privilege. It is years since I have said it. How almost oppressively happy I am to-night!" she concluded, with a laugh that sounded almost hysterical.

"Hush, dear! You must not give way to excitement," said her ladyship, in a tone of gentle reproach as she folded her arms about the slight form and drew the golden head upon her breast.

"We must not forget that the day after to-morrow will be a very important one in the calendar of your life, and we must keep you strong and well. But what were you going to say when I interrupted you?"

"I was going to ask you if this little key really unlocks anything or whether it is only an ornament?" Allison replied, as she toyed with the tiny trinket upon her neck.

Lady Bromley's face grew very sorrowful at the question. Gently releasing herself from Allison's embrace, she went to a trunk and brought forth a beautiful casket of ebony, inlaid with pearls and gold. This she placed upon the table beside which they had been sitting, unlocked it, and threw back the cover.

Allison uttered an exclamation of delight as she saw the array of precious and beautiful jewels that were thus exposed to her gaze.

"Almost all of them were given to me by your father, dear," said her ladyship tremulously; "but I rarely wear any of them now, for I am still in deep mourning for him. Here is a likeness he gave me just before he left me to go back to England."

She opened a beautiful locket as she spoke, and passed it to Allison, who found herself looking into a frank, rather boyish, but altogether attractive face, with eyes very like her own, and smiling lips which she felt very sure never gave utterance to aught but kindly and courteous words.

She sighed as she softly closed the case and passed it back to her mother. She did not speak; there were tears in her eyes, a choking sensation in her throat, and she could not.

Presently Lady Bromley found what she was seeking for, a small golden cube about an inch and a half square, and richly studded with rubies and diamonds. She laid it in Allison's hand.

"Unlock it!" she gently commanded. "You have the key."

With an expression of wonder in her great blue eyes, the girl detached the mysterious key from the chain about her neck, inserted it in the lock, and turned it. Then, with a strange thrill quivering through all her nerves, she lifted the lid and saw, lying within a nest of white velvet, a plain but heavy circlet of gold. She lifted an inquiring look at her companion.

"There is an inscription engraved on its inner surface. Read it, dear," said Lady Bromley.

Removing it with reverent touch, Allison turned it to the light and read:

"C. B. to M. L., Dec. 24, 18—"

"It is my wedding-ring," her mother explained with tremulous lips, "but it has never been upon my hand since that one happy week which my husband and I spent together in Boston just after our marriage. The day before he was to leave me he brought me that tiny golden casket. 'My darling,' he said, 'it will never do for you

to wear that telltale circlet when you go back to school, so I have brought you this to keep it in until I come back to you. Lock it safely away. I have had the key fixed so that you can wear it either as a pin or upon a chain, and now this secret will be yours and mine alone.' So I did as he wished. I never told even Helen about my little treasure-chest. It seemed very strange to me when, thinking of it afterward, that when she decided to take you away she should have been inspired to select from among so many trinkets the one thing of all which would deprive me of the only proof in my possession of my marriage. I cannot be thankful enough now that she did so, for the very peculiarity of the ornament and the fact that it alone will unlock the golden casket helps to prove your identity. After my husband rejoined me he wished to have the casket forced, so that I could have my ring. But I said no. Somehow, I felt myself unworthy to wear that sacred circlet. I was oppressed with a sense of guilt for even, in my weakness and despair, entertaining for a moment the thought of sending my child from me. He told me that I was foolish and notional. I suppose I was. Still, I could not help the feeling. He insisted that I must have something in place of it, then. It would not do for me to be going about without any symbol of marriage, and he bought me this—showing a similar band—which I have worn ever since, although I would not allow it to be marked."

Allison gently took her mother's left hand and drew off all the rings from the third finger.

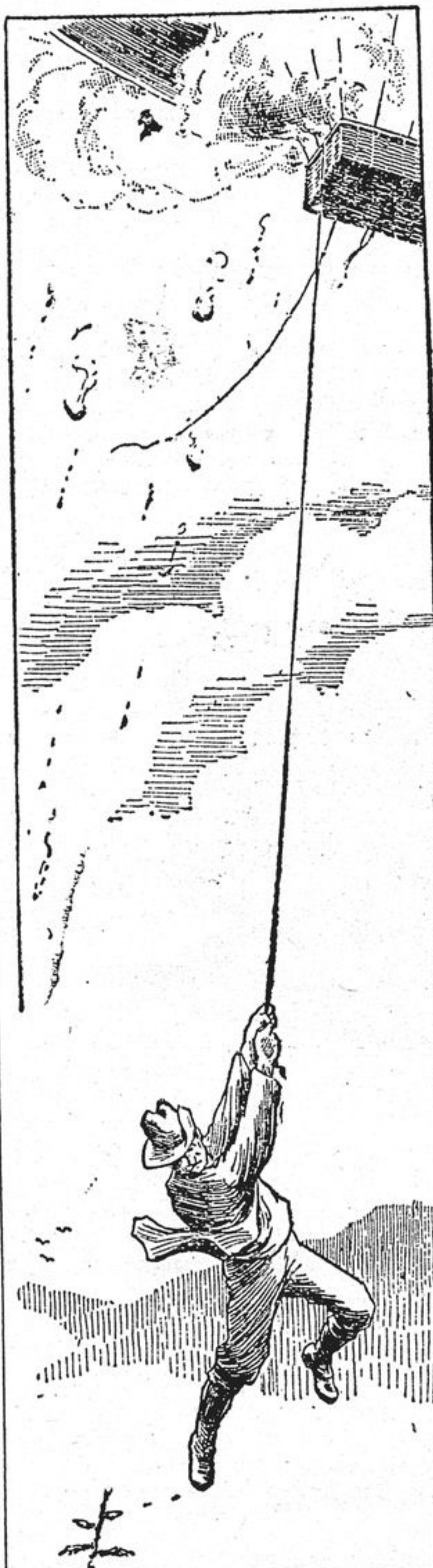
Then, holding the original wedding-ring up before her, she asked:

"May I put this back now?"

"Yes, dear," said Lady Bromley, but with tears in her eyes.

Allison slipped it into its place, then replaced her other jewels above it, after which she bent and left a soft caress, like a benediction, upon the slender white hand.

(To be continued.)



Man wants but little here below, but wants that little long.—Life.

Brazil supplies half the world's coffee.

Perfumes have been used from the earliest times. The burning of perfumed incense was one of the rites of the Hebrew and Pagan religions, and perfumes of various sorts were used by nearly all the nations of antiquity. Both the Romans and the Greeks were skilled in making perfumery. It was from the Arabs, who possessed the art of preparing perfumed waters, that the use of perfumes was introduced into mediaeval Europe.

The Farm

SHEEP.

No amount of feed will keep the flock from running down if covered with ticks.

Comparatively few farmers realize the loss sustained in a flock from ticks, but attribute it many times to other causes.

Every sheep pasture should have an abundance of pure water.

Watch the fences and repair the weak places. Prevent the first outbreak and the flock will be easily controlled.

Put bells on several members of the flock as a safeguard against dogs.

No more sheep should be kept than can be given good care.

Every farmer should have a small flock for economic reasons.

Every farmer could easily have a nearly perfect flock, even if small.

Turn off the inferior ewes, and so keep improving the flock.

Keep the ram in a dry, clean, light pen in the barn and feed him well.

Seven or eight sheep will pasture where one cow would. From this you can tell how many sheep you can keep, if you are now keeping cows and wish to change off to sheep.

If you have any patches of land that are weedy, fence them off and give the sheep a chance at them. They will trim them up in short order.

Get around often where the sheep are; salt them, count them and make friends of them.

Do not allow the dealer to come in and sort out the largest and finest lambs and leave the culls.

Sometimes farmers sell their lambs at a fixed sum per head early in the season. The dealer will call when he needs lambs and sort out the best and never come to get the smaller ones at all.

Sheep must have special feeding. They are essentially pasturing and browsing animals, living in summer on pasture and in winter on dried herbage or on the soft sprouts of bushes. We do not change the natural habits of animals by domestication to any such extent as to alter their feeding or modes of life.

Sheep cannot feed on sour food; they require fresh, soft watery food even in the winter to maintain best condition. That the sheep of Great Britain have become the finest in the world is the result of the common practice of feeding roots during winter. This succulent feeding, with unrivaled pastures for the summer, shows in excellence of meat as well as of fleece.

FARM NOTES.

Drawing out of the soil without replenishing the fertility is like drawing money out of a bank without making any deposits.

The best breed of stock for a man is generally the kind he likes best, for he will take more interest in and care of such animals.

Anyone not familiar with the use of sulphuric acid had better leave it alone, and buy fertilizer from a competent manufacturer. There is usually on the farm no means for thoroughly mixing the acid with bones, and on the thoroughness of this work success will largely depend.

Loss of valuable elements takes place in stable manure immediately after it is made and it is never so good again. This loss is small when the manure is kept under cover and spread out, but when put out of doors in a pile loss by fermentation and leaching sets in and becomes a material waste in the aggregate. Economy in time, labor and material is affected when it is hauled directly to the field.

We would like to say to all farmers and those interested in poultry-raising, do not try to breed the fancy with the practical. Master the practical first; then see what you can do with the fancy. But we advise the use of thoroughbred stock for practical purposes, by all means, getting new cocks each year to add vigor to the young chicks, remembering what has been done by one man can always be done again.

Straw as it comes from the thrasher is not a good absorbent of liquids. Nature made it strong resistant and practically indurated for its own seed's protection, and until the straw is crushed or cut or in some way broken, it takes up very little moisture, and as an agent for the conservation of liquid excrement it is nearly useless.

But let it be run through the cutter so that it is cut and crushed, and it is no longer impervious to

moisture. When so prepared half the quantity of straw will produce better results both in absorbing liquids and keeping the animals clean than can be secured when the long straw is used.

DAIRY AND STOCK.

A filthy hog is a reproach to its owners. It prefers on the whole to be clean, but for some reason most hog owners seem to argue otherwise and act accordingly.

How would you like it of a big policeman were to give you a kick or a clout on the ear every time something startles you? And yet that would be as reasonable as it is to jerk and whip a horse when he is startled.

Certain diseases among the human kind, such as typhoid, small-pox and the like, are known as "filth diseases," and are in the main preventable. Most diseases of hogs and cows justly come under the same head.

The dairy head should include no sick animal and especially none showing signs of tuberculosis, contagious abortion or other trouble associated with parturition, or with mammitis mammary abscess or other udder disease, persistent diarrhoea, actinomycosis, fever or any febrile disease.

KNOWLEDGE WHISPERS.

Little Bits of Information Which It Would be Well to Know.

A single bee collects only a teaspoonful of honey during a season.

Twenty-seven thousand vessels yearly enter the port of London.

Nine days' sickness in a year is the average amount suffered by a human being.

A squadron, in Army parlance, consists of two troops, each of 60 to 100 men.

The reading-room of the British Museum has accommodation for 60,000 books.

Doctors in France are prohibited by law from inheriting property left them by deceased patients.

Red-haired people are less likely to become bald than those who have their hair of other tints.

The Salvation Army is established in fifty-two countries and colonies, and preaches the Gospel in thirty-two languages.

The Turkish bath was introduced into England about fifty years ago by the Eastern traveller, Mr. David Urquhart, M. P.

The standard from which the English yard measure is taken was the arm of King Henry I., which was exactly three feet long.

Wire hairpins were first manufactured in England in 1545. The female coiffures were held in place by five wooden skewers before that time.

Eighty horses generally stand in the Castle stables when the Court is at Windsor, and at the Royal Mews of Buckingham Palace 120 horses are kept.

Japan has no national music, and the first melodies many of the race ever heard, apart from those of the birds, were hymns sung by Christian missionaries.

As shown by the camera, a flash of lightning is made up in innumerable small flashes, each one following the other by an almost imperceptible period of time.

Some of the African tribes pull their fingers till the joints "crack" as a form of salutation, and one tribe has the curious fashion of showing friendship by standing back to back.

There are parts of Spain where the hat is unknown, except in pictures. The men, when they need a covering, tie up their heads in a handkerchief, and the women use flowers.

The human skeleton consists of some 200 bones, though the number of separate bones varies at different times of life. Bones which are distinct in early life become fused in old age.

The German Empire was formed in 1871, after the Franco-German War, by the confederation of twenty-six states, many of which had already been united as the North German Confederation.

The Czar of Russia probably owns a greater quantity of china than any other person in the world. He has the china belonging to all the Russian rulers as far back as Catherine the Great. It is stored in an immense closet in the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg.

The Germans are learning the lesson that thrift requires saving in small things. There the steel pens thrown away in the schools and offices are conscientiously gathered, melted up, and made into knife-blades, and other articles of value.

The term "infantry" was first used by the Spaniards in the wars with the Moors to designate the bodyguard of a Royal Prince or Infanta. It was extended to the entire body of foot soldiers, and finally adopted throughout Europe.