THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER I.

"Gerald—It cannot be true."

"It is true."

There was a ring of triumph and joy in the voice of the young man who spoke, and the sweet-faced woman thrilled at the tone of confidence with which the words were uttered.

"I cannot comprehend. It is all so strange. What a complication."

"I have the proofs here," said Gerald Winchester, as he held up the papers in his hand.

It was, indeed, a strange situation; the young man who, but a short time before, had been but a clerk in the office of the wealthy banker, Adam Brewster, now standing proudly, with the mystery of his birth cleared by the strange revelations that the ancient foot-stool had furnished, as the son and heir of the dead millionaire.

Lady Bromley, who had been chiefly instrumental in the discovery of the precious documents in their strange hiding-place, gazed at her protege with eyes kindling with joy.

"Ah, Gerald!" she cried eagerly; let me see the papers. It seems almost incredible."

"See!" he said excitedly, as he handed a paper to the woman; "this is a certificate proving the marriage of Miriam Harris to Adam Brewster, in the year 18—, and here, dated a little less than a year afterward, is another to certify to the baptism of Gerald Winchester Brewster."

"Then—then you are not the son of Miss Winchester's brother, as you have always supposed!" said Lady Bromley, after she had carefully examined the papers which he had given her.

"No, it seems not; at least, if my surmises are correct," Gerald replied, but with a look of perplexity sweeping over his face. "Everything seems terribly confused, as yet, and, possibly, I may have jumped at conclusions somewhat prematurely, but I hope not. You see, there was a lot of rubbish in that thing"—with a glance at the overturned cricket upon the floor. "Perhaps I should not speak of it in that way; but, at any rate, it seemed like rubbish to me when I was looking it over; but, at the bottom, I came across a bulky envelope addressed to me in my aunt's hand. In it were these papers, and several sheets which she had filled, and which will doubtless explain everything."

"But who was Miriam Harris?" questioned her ladyship, still studying the certificate.

Gerald turned back to the table and gathered up a couple of other papers lying there.

"Miriam Harris, according to these documents, was the only child of Martha Winchester, who married a certain Arthur Harris in 18—, some twenty-five years previous to the date of those slips that you have. She must have been a younger sister of Aunt Honor's, which would make the latter my great-aunt, instead of my father's sister, as I have always supposed her to be. This, too, explains why she was so much older than seemed consistent, if she had been my own aunt. I have always known that my mother's name was Miriam Harris, but I supposed that she married a Winchester."

"Well, it is all very, very strange," thoughtfully observed Lady Bromley, "but I wonder why the knowledge of it has been kept from you! Why, if you are Adam Brewster's son, were you not under your father's care to profit by the advantage and position which he could have given you, instead of being committed to the care of Miss Winchester, to be reared in such obscurity?"

"That is a mystery to me as yet," replied Gerald, flushing sensitively; "but I presume that Aunt Honor's letter will explain the matter. "Oh!" he continued, with a pathetic yearning in his voice, "why could it not have been? It seems cruel! Cruel! And now I can understand why I was so peculiarly drawn to him! I often used to say to myself, when we were working together in his office: 'Ah! if I could only have had such a father, how proud and happy I should have been!' He, too, was fond of me, in a way, and he trusted me instinctively from the first; he once told me that he 'would stake his fortune upon my faithfulness and integrity.' I can now understand why we were so drawn to each other—it was the tie of blood, of kinship, struggling for expression, for recognition," he continued, a note of exultation in his tones.

He was trembling visibly, and his companion saw that it was with great difficulty he could preserve his self-control.

"What did I tell you, Gerald?" she said, with a roguish smile, to change the tenor of his thoughts. "Was I not, after all, a true prophetess about the lord of high degree?"

"Well, in a certain sense, you were," he said, with an answering smile, "for although Mr. Brewster was invested with no title, he was an honest, noble man, which means more to me than any appellation, however exalted, and I am very proud of being the son of such a father; only there will always be a sense of irreparable loss on account of our mutual ignorance of the fact."

"Yes, that does seem too bad," returned his friend, with a regretful sigh; "there are so many things that are too bad in this queer world of ours. Of course, you cannot feel otherwise than gratified over this remarkable discovery; and if Mr. Brewster could have known that you were his son, I am sure he would have been as proud of the relationship as yourself. It will certainly be a great comfort to you, throughout the remainder of your life to remember that you were his constant companion for some years, and that during that time you enjoyed his full confidence."

"Yes, indeed, from the depths of my soul I am grateful for those years of confidential companionship; but, oh, his whole life seems to have been enshrouded in mystery, as well as my own; there was his second marriage, and the discovery that Allison was not his own child——"

"Not his own child, Gerald!" repeated Lady Bromley, in surprise.

"No. I have not told you about that. I have not been able to talk very much about her, you know," he responded huskily; "but I will relate the whole story to you some time, after this puzzle is all solved." The details of the story of the death of the beautiful girl in the railroad accident were always haunting him. "Then there is that inexplicable story about the present so-called Mrs. Adam Brewster. Ha!——"

"Well—what?" quickly inquired her ladyship, as he broke off with a violent start, a strange look sweeping over his face.

"Wait, wait!" he said almost breathlessly, the veins filling out suddenly upon his forehead, a dusky red suffusing his face; "I will tell you presently; excuse me a moment while I go to my room."

He sprang to the door, and was gone before she could detain him.

The excitement of the remarkable revelations was also telling upon her, and, feeling almost exhausted, she sank into a chair to rest, and to study anew the papers which she still retained.

Gerald was absent fully ten minutes, and when he returned he was startlingly pale, while there was a look of stern determination written upon every line of his face.

He had some newspapers in his hands.

"There has been a vile plot at work! I said it! I knew it! And now I am more strongly convinced of it than ever!" he said, almost hoarsely, he was so excited. "See here!" he went on, pointing to an article in one of the papers; "this gives a full acount of that woman's claim upon Adam Brewster and his estate. It also gives the date of the certificate which she brought to prove her marriage to him, and it corresponds exactly with that upon the one you hold in your hands—April 10, 18—, is it not?"

"Yes," replied her ladyship, after referring to the document in her hands.

"Then do you not see—oh! it is all so plain to me now!" Gerald continued eagerly. "John Hubbard must have been at the bottom of all that Brewster scandal and trial. He must have learned by some means of Mr. Brewster's early marriage, and that it was a secret which no one besides himself was supposed to know anything about; and the man himself being dead, and Allison also, the rest was comparatively easy for such an arch-plotter as he has always been. He must have come across those records in New Haven, or else known about them, obtained the dates, names, etc., procured an accomplice to help him carry out his scheme, by appearing as the wife of that early marriage, and so managed, in his usually clever manner, to work up this romantic story and case, which has thrown that magnificent fortune into his hands."

"Your reasoning certainly sounds very plausible, Gerald," responded his friend.

"I shall go directly to New Haven to-morrow morning and search those records for myself. I will ascertain how a person whose maiden name was Louisa Simpson could have been passed off for another who was known as Miriam Harris," said Gerald, with considerable warmth.

"All things are possible, you know," she gently returned; then added, with a start: "But if you can prove that your mother was Adam Brewster's wife, it will make that other certificate, which the present supposed Mrs. Brewster produced, a fraud—will it not? And thus you will be found to be the sole heir to the Brewster fortune."

"Yes—at least, so it seems to me," Gerald assented.

"You will try to prove it?"

"Assuredly, if I am convinced, after my investigations in New Haven, that there is the ghost of a chance for me. I have been bitterly unreconciled to the fact that John Hubbard has secured all that wealth which, it seemed to me until now, should have gone to Mrs. Charles Manning, who is the daughter of Mr. Brewster's sister; but, on the basis of the remarkable discovery of to-day, I shall at once begin to work for my own interests—after consulting with Mr. Lyttleton, of course; he will know instantly whether there will be any chance for me—— Ha, ha!" he laughed out suddenly, as his mind reverted to some circumstance of the past.

"Why do you laugh—what amuses you?" inquired his friend.

She was thrillingly interested in his wonderful history, and did not wish to lose a single point.

"I was thinking of a certain morning some three and a half years ago, when this man vowed that he would crush me and everything else that stood in his path," the young man explained, "and I was wondering how he might feel if the situation was destined to be reversed."

Then he told her the little story about the beautiful rose, which Allison had playfully thrown at him on that lovely summer day — how John Hubbard had afterward purposely knocked it to the floor and ruthlessly set his heel upon it, and warned him that it was typical of his own fate.

"But I have it even now," he continued, opening a tiny locket that was attached to his watch-chain; "I carefully gathered up every leaf and petal, and, later laid them incased in this, vowing that it should be my mascot, instead of the symbol of my defeat and ruin."

He then related, also, how the man had tampered with his book-keeping, to make it appear that he had been defrauding his employer, and how he had caused his arrest in the bank upon that fateful Sunday morning.

"What a wretch!" indignantly exclaimed Lady Bromley, when he concluded. "I should judge that he had been a sharper from his youth up. I wonder that so shrewd a man as you have represented Mr. Brewster should have become associated in business with him. But I would really glory in seeing you win the Brewster fortune from him. Why, it seems to me that he must have been scheming for it for many years! His jealousy of you, in connection with Allison, whom, it is evident, he intended to marry, if possible; and then, when she was so strangely removed, marrying that other girl, who appeared as the own and only daughter of the banker—all seem to point to that as the goal he was seeking."

"Yes; those are my views exactly," said Gerald; "and his union with this Miss Anna Brewster was the cleverest move of all, for to him it would prove a bulwark of safety for all time—providing no other flaw was discovered in his work. If he had simply employed those women as accomplices, and then let them go, after paying them a certain price, he would always have been in danger of exposure. Now, however, they all have a common interest, and he never need fear any betrayal through them. But, Mr. John Hubbard, I firmly believe that at last I have found that 'pebble' for my sling!" he concluded, with significant emphasis.

"What do you mean, Gerald?" cried Lady Bromley, laughing at his peculiar tone and language. "Enigmas appear to be the order of this remarkable day."

He explained to her by relating something of his interview with Mr. Hubbard the day he had met him on the Strand, in London, when the man had twitted him with being a braggart in assuming to be "a second David aching to slay another Goliath."

"I believe I have found my pebble in those papers which you hold in your hands," he concluded, as he pointed to him with a finger that trembled visibly.

"I believe you have, too," she gravely observed; "and"—laughingly using his own smile—"your sling I know will never fail you while there is a shred of evidence left to prove your position, while something seems to tell me that you will have no difficulty in proving yourself to be Mr. Brewster's son and the only heir to his great wealth."

"Ah! But what good will it do me now?" Gerald burst forth, with sudden pain and passion. "It will seem but a mockery—but the bitter irony of fate. Oh, Allison! Allison! What is anything in life to me now that I have lost you?"

Lady Bromley could have wept for him, for the anguish in his tone was like a sharp arrow in her own heart; but putting a strong curb upon herself, she arose and went to his side

"Put these safely away, Gerald," she said, as she placed the certificates in his hand; "then read your aunt's letter—you do not half-know your own history yet—for, doubtless, it contains a great deal that will interest you, and, possibly, some other important information."

(To be continued.)

TREE PLANTING IN HOLLAND.

Elms and Lindens the Best, but the Elm is the Hardier.

There is perhaps no other well populated country in the world which has so many well wooded towns as has Holland. Most of the streets and grachts or canals have avenues of trees. Utrecht has two rows of trees on either side of its quaint canals. Its canal banks are constructed as if in two stories. The lower story, almost flush with the water level, is lined with warehouses and vaults, while the upper story has dwellings and shops. Both levels are planted with trees.

So many avenues of trees make a Dutch town exceedingly pleasant, especially on a hot day. The foliage tempers the glare of the sun and the vistas of green are refreshing to the eye. These abundant growths in thickly populated towns are highly useful as well as ornamental. It is recognized that from a hygienic point of view they are valuable to the citizens.

In Holland these useful services are gratefully recognized and the trees are carefully tended by the municipalities. The cost of this care per capita in the different towns varies somewhat. Last year, for example, Utrecht devoted 21 cents (Dutch) to its trees for each inhabitant and The Hague 28 cents for each of its 259,000 citizens. It takes 2½ Dutch cents to equal an American cent. About ten years ago the annual cost of caring for the trees of The Hague was 19 cents (Dutch) per capita, but since that time many new trees and shrubs have been planted throughout the city and new parks have been laid out.

It has been found that not every kind of tree will thrive in the streets of a town, for trees have many enemies both above and below ground. Gas escaping from pipes underground is the worst enemy of trees, because quite small quantities of it are deadly. For this reason special precautions are taken against the leakage of gas in Dutch towns. How electricity escaping underground acts upon trees as yet has not been sufficiently studied to be understood. Trees will not grow in very narrow streets where the houses are high; neither will they thrive if the pavement does not let in moisture and air in sufficient quantities.

The best trees for street planting in Holland are elms and lindens, but the elm is the hardier of the two and will grow where a linden will not. Trees of these kinds reach a great age, like the old elms along the quiet grachts of Edam, one of the "dead" cities of the Zuyder Zee, which saw the fleets of Van Tromp and De Ruyter in the harbor of Edam—the harbor which appears so tiny to modern eyes that one with difficulty imagines "the terror of the North Sea" anchoring there. Then there are the magnificent lindens of the Mallebaan in Utrecht, which appealed to the French monarch, King Louis XIV. Those lindens he commanded his soldiers to spare on peril of their lives.

PIRATES OF THE AIR.

Little Danger of a Raid on the Bank of England.

The Bank of England has at present £40,000,000 of gold stored in its vaults. This is not a record amount, but it has not often been exceeded. As a prominent financier recently suggested that some steps should be taken to protect the nation's treasure-house from possible raids by foreign dirigibles or areroplanes, it may be interesting to estimate just what the danger from this source is.

Assuming that an airship might float over the Old Lady of Threadneedle street and throw out a bomb which would wreck the traesure vaults below, of what benefit would it be to the elevator? Sovereigns run about fifffty-six to the pound, avoirdpois, so that, roughly, the £40,000,000 in the bank would weigh 320 tons. Zeppelin's airship, the most formidable by far of all dirigibles, has never yet attempted to carry more than 26 passengers, whose combined weight would probably be no more than 4,000 pounds, or two tons. It would require a fleet of 160 of these aerial monsters to carry off the bank's gold. One of them could not possibly take away more than £250,000, and most airships could not make an ascent with a fifth of that amount.

A passenger-carrying aeroplane may be said to have a cargo-carrying capacity of 250 pounds—roughly, £14,000 in gold. It would toke 3,000 such machines to get away with the £40,000,000 in the bank.

NATURALLY SO.

"I wonder what man on record called the biggest bluff?"

"I guess it was the man who named Gibraltar."

THE MUTTON BIRDS.

Trapping Them Only Means of Livelihood of Inhabitants.

Some time back a party of twenty-five interested in nature study and kindred subjects formed themselves into a party to make a sea tour among the islands lying between Australia and Tasmania and off the coast of the latter place, says the Sydney Times.

One of the party on his return said there are hundreds of islands in the locality mentioned which from a distance look like mere barren rocks, but on closer examination prove to be fertile territory, many of the islands being inhabited by white communities or native and half caste people who have occupied themselves for many years as trappers of mutton birds for export to Tasmania and for their own consumption. The average catch on one island is about 1,500,000 birds a year, and the income from this source amounts to between £5,00 and £6,000.

The dark skinned people who occupy Cape Barren Island are of all shades, from the mere suggestion of tint to pure black, and they have been of this variegated skin color for nearly 100 years. There is a school on this island attended by sixty or seventy children, the teacher being paid by the Tasmanian Government, which satisfies its conscience in respect to these unfortunates by merely giving them instruction in "the three R's" and taking no further trouble to help them to put their education to practical account when they have finished their period of school. They are naturally nomadic in their instincts and do not know how to organize their affairs, hence as soon as they leave the school they take on the mode of life of their elders, living well when the birds are plentiful and going short to a greater or less extent in the off season.

The touring party concerned itself largely with the bird life found upon the various islands, the specimens including albatross, gannet, gulls, dotterels, oyster catchers, pelicans, geese and mutton birds. On Albatross Island, the bird the place is named after, hatches its young, and it is said that this is the only known place in the world where the bird makes its nest, an old theory being that these mysterious creatures hatched out their young on their backs, a theory no doubt absurd, yet forgivable in the early days when nobody had discovered their hatching place.

Mutton birds flock on various islands in the vicinity in myraids and the eggs of various birds abound in such huge numbers that shiploads of them could be gathered with comparatively little trouble. It is said that numbers of eggs from these islands find their way into market and are sold as duck eggs, which they resemble in appearance and flavor.

THOUGHT HER IN MISERY.

The celebrated soprano was in the middle of her solo when little Johnny said to his mother, referring to the conductor of the orchestra, "Why does that man hit at the woman with his stick?"

"He is not hitting at her," replied his mother. "Keep quiet."

"Well, then, what is she hollerin' so for?"

"After taking three bottles of your wonderful medicine, our baby was entirely well and needed no more medicine. At sixteen months of age she weighed thirty pounds. She had cried eight months, night and day, and nothing did her good until we tried *Scott's Emulsion*."—MRS. E. C. SMITH, Villa Rica, Ga.

Scott's Emulsion

probably saved this child's life. Four doctors had been tried. SCOTT'S EMULSION seemed to be just the thing needed, and it is just the thing needed by thousands of other children. It's so easily digested, so pure and harmless, yet most powerful in building up the most delicate child or adult. But be sure to get SCOTT'S EMULSION, there are so many worthless and harmful imitations.

ALL DRUGGISTS

A full copy of Mrs. Smith's letter and many others of a similar nature, together with some of our valuable literature regarding children, will be sent upon receipt of your address, mentioning this paper.

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About the Farm

SELLING LOW-GRADE SEED.

Practices tending to defeat the purpose of the "Seed Control Act," in protecting the farmer, are reported as being prevalent in some sections of Canada, even among farmers themselves. Not only this, but also the regulations in the Act, are being violated. Seedsmen justly protest against farmers who produce grass and clover seeds, selling them to neighbors, when the standard is lower than the law allows them to handle.

Farmers seem to forget that they are liable under the Seed Control Act. The only exemption is that the farmer is not obliged to have "each and every receptacle, package, sack or bag containing such seeds, or a label securely attached thereto, marked in a plain and indelible manner," showing name and address of seller, kind of seed contained, and common names of weed seeds present. Instances are known where those who deal in seeds refused to purchase lots of seeds from growers because of the presence of foul seeds, and where the farmer then sold the same seed to his neighbors. Seed represented as being number one, must not contain more than one of the following weed seeds per 1,500 of the seed represented: Wild Mustard; Tumbling Mustard, Hare's-ear Mustard, Ball Mustard, Field Pennycress (Stinkweed or French Weed), Wild Oats, Blindweed, Perennial Sow Thistle, Ragweed, Purple Cockle, Cow Cockle, Orange Hawkweed (Paint Brush), Ergot of Rye (Sclerotia), White Cockle, Night-flowering Catchfly, False Flax, Canada Thistle, Ox-eye Daisy, Curled Dock, Blue Weed, Ribgrass (English Plantain or Buckhorn) In addition, seed of first quality, offered for sale, must "contain, out of every one hundred seeds, not less than ninety-nine seeds of the kind or kinds represented, or seeds of other useful and harmless grasses and clovers, of which ninety-nine seeds ninety must be germinable.

For the general trade in seeds, the following section applies to all: "No person shall sell or offer, expose or have in his possession for sale, for the purpose of seeding in Canada, any seeds of timothy, alsike or red clover, or any mixture containing the said seeds, if the seeds of the weeds named in this Act are present in a greater proportion than five to one thousand of the seed sold or offered, exposed or held in possession for sale."

Every intelligent farmer realizes that only clean farming pays, and that, in order to keep down weeds, strict care must be taken to avoid introducing the pests through grain, grass or clover seeds. Protection is afforded against all vendors, whether seedsman, general storekeeper or farmer.

In order to be fair to those who handle seeds, the Act stipulates that complaint must be made within seven days. The section relating to this reads: "Any sample of seeds taken from any seed found or suspected to be sold in violation of the provisions of this Act shall be taken and forwarded to an official seed analyst: (a) From seeds that are sold in sealed packages, sacks, bags, or receptacles, at the time of breaking the seal thereon; and (b) from seeds that are not sold in sealed packages, sacks, bags or receptacles, within seven days from the date on which the seeds entered into the personal possession and became the property of the purchaser." Samples for official analysis are to be drawn in the presence of the vendor or two disinterested witnesses, and forwarded with a certified statement, accompanied by name and address of the vendor, and particulars relating to the seed.

Those making purchases of seed would do well to examine it carefully at the time of purchase. If there is ground for complaint, write at once to the Seed Commissioner, Ottawa, Ont. It is his duty to make investigation, and do everything possible to protect the purchaser from undue contamination of his fields with foul seeds, and, if circumstances warrant, to prosecute the vendor of such seed.

Four conditions form exceptions to the Act, viz.: (a) Any person growing or selling seeds for the purpose of food; (b) any person selling seeds direct to merchants, to be cleaned or graded before being offered for sale for seeding purposes; (c) seed held in storage, to be reclaimed before being sold for seeding purposes; (d) seed marked "not absolutely clean," and held or sold for export only. All seed held for sale in Canada for seeding purposes, comes under the Act, and offenders are liable to prosecution. During the past few weeks samples have been collected from stock sold by farmers, and if there is proof of violation of the act, the offenders are liable to prosecution. In the interests of Canadian agriculture, those farmers who are guilty of selling low-grade seed should be dealt with just as promptly as they would have other vendors treated.—Farmer's Advocate.