THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER XIV.—(Cont'd)

A few days later the fair invalid was found to be doing so well that Doctor Latimer gave Lady Bromley permission to pay her a short visit, for she was continually asking questions about herself and her friends which it was thought best to have answered, and thus stt her mind at rest.

Accordingly, her ladyship was admitted and introduced to her, whereupon she explained her position and her friendly relations with Gerald. From the moment she entered the room, Allison betrayed great pleasure in her presence.

"You know Gerald—you are fond of him, they tell me," she eagerly remarked, after they had greeted each other. "Won't you sit here, close beside me, and tell me everything that has happened since I saw him last? Can it be possible that it is almost the last of December, and that life has been an utter blank to me ever since July?"

So Lady Bromley told her whatever she could think of to interest her, Allison listening with almost breathless interest to all that concerned Gerald, and every day after that her new friend went to sit with her for one or two hours, as they thought best.

On the tenth day after the operation, Allison seemed to be doing so well and was so impaitent to see Gerald that Lady Bromley was authorized by Doctor Latimer to summon him. And so the following telegram went thrilling along the wires to Mr. Lyttleton:

"All is well. Tell Gerald, and send him on immediately."

The young man was out when this message reached the office, and his employer could scarcely wait for his return. The poor fellow had been very brave—that is, he had tried to bear his trouble patiently and uncomplainingly, but it had worn upon him sadly, and the look of stoical endurance which his face had seemed to take on, like a mask, was painfully pathetic to the kind-hearted lawyer.

At times, when they were consulting about the approaching trial, which both felt confident would result in Gerald's favor, the expression of bitter anguish which would sweep over his features told Mr. Lyttleton more plainly than words could have done that the fortune which was then almost within his grasp would give him no real satisfaction, that it would bring him only pain and regret, since he had lost the bride for whom alone he had coveted wealth.

At length his steps sounded on the stairs without, and sent a nervous thrill through the heart of the lawyer. The message he had received from his sister was crumpled in his hand, his breathing was rapid, and his temples beat almost audibly—at least to himself.

"Gerald," he said, after the young man had removed his hat and coat, and was in the act of sitting down to his desk, "how would you like to take a run on to Boston for a day or two?"

"To Boston!" repeated the young man, astonished. "We have no business to call either of us there, have we?"

"No, but my sister thinks she would like a little visit from you," replied Mr. Lyttleton, beating helplessly about the bush, and not knowing how to get down to his duty.

"She is very good," said Gerald, smiling; "but really, I think we are too busy just now to spare time for pleasure-trips."

"I think you might be spared for a couple of days. I—I—— Gerald"—with a desperate effort—"do you think you can brace yourself for some—news?"

"Ha!" cried the startled fellow, suddenly galvanized to interest, and, leaping to his feet, he stared wildly at his companion. "News—of—of——"

"Yes, of—her; of Miss Brewster."

"The mystery of her fate is solved—you have learned how she died?"

"No—how she was—saved! Gerald, she is alive!"

"Alive! My God! How? Crippled, disfigured, maimed!" the agonized lover articulated in a horrible whisper.

"No, Gerald, no! Don't look like that," said Mr. Lyttleton, turning away with a shiver from the white, drawn face. "She is alive and well or will be very soon."

Gerald gasped and dropptd back into his chair, his head falling upon his desk, while his powers of endurance at last utterly forsaking him, heartrending sobs burst from his lips.

Mr. Lyttleton could bear no more. He simply gathered all his sister's recent letters and messages together, and, rising, laid them beside the prostrate lover.

"Here, Gerald, read these when you can pull yourself together a bit," he said huskily; "they will explain everything to you. Meantime, I am going down to the City Hall to look over some records."

Then he went out, softly closing the door after him, and Gerald was left alone to master the temporary weakness caused by reaction, and to try to realize the blessed hope and great joy that had come to him so unexpectedly.

Strong and manly though he was, his love and gratitude were temporarily stronger than his will-power, and, bursting all barriers, had to have their way. The wonderful news had taken him so unawares he had had no opportunity to "brace" himself, and the reaction from the iron-clad endurance which he had hitherto manifested was in exact proportion to that unyielding fortitude.

But, with the emptying forth of his long-pent emotions, his heart began to rebound, and an eager desire to learn the blessed truth in all its details took possession of him.

He was weak and trembling from his excessive agitation, but nerving himself as best he could, he gathered up Lady Bromley's letters and messages, and, looking for the earlier dates, read from the beginning the wonderful story of Allison's preservation as she had given it to her brother.

CHAPTER XV.

By the time he concluded the perusal of these missives he was a different man. His dejected air had all disappeared, his listless manner was replaced by the old-time vigor and energy, his eye had grown bright, and hope was written upon every line of his beaming face, even though it was still pale and thin from the wearing grief of the last six months.

He refolded the letttrs and restored them to their proper envelopes, tied them together, and laid them upon Mr. Lyttleton's desk. Then he arranged the papers on his own desk, putting his work in an orderly manner, but laying one side such papers as he knew his employer would need during his absence—for he no longer felt that he was "too busy" to make "the little visit to Boston" which Lady Bromley had suggested.

When Mr. Lyttleton returned, his own face shone with pleasure on beholding the change in his young clerk.

"H'm!" with a glance at Gerald's trim-looking desk. "You do not appear to feel yourself so pressed for time as you were a couple of hours ago," he observed, with a quiet chuckle.

"No. Of course, I can find time to go to Boston under existing circumstances. I would go to the ends of the earth upon such a mission," returned Gerald, with a luminous smile, a ring of joy in his voice that had long been a stranger there. "But what a wonderful story it is!" he went on. "It seems almost incredible!"

"It does, indeed," replied his friend. "But I cannot understand how her death could have been reported in the Boston papers. You know it was claimed that a Miss Brewster was identified and removed from the morgue by her friends."

"Yes, that has always been a mystery," said Gerald; "but possibly it will all be explained later. It was a very close shave, though, for the poor girl, and I shall be grateful to this Mr. Lyman as long as I live."

"He has certainly proved himself to be a Christian gentleman," Mr. Lyttleton admitted; then added, as he looked at his watch: "Now, what are your plans? Will you take the five o'clock boat, or the evening express? I think you might as well make tracks for home, pack your grip. and be off."

"I think I will take the boat. I shall have a better night's rest than on a sleeper, and will reach Boston in good season, and be able to get out of Brookline some time during the forenoon," Gerald responded reflectively.

"All right. Go ahead, and joy go with you, my boy. You can have a couple of days as well as not, and I am glad for you from the bottom of my heart," said Mr. Lyttleton, as he heartily shook hands with him.

Accordingly, Gerald started forth to prepare for his trip, the world wearing a very different aspect to him from what it had worn three hours previously.

Leaping upon a car, he went directly home, where he was soon packing his portmanteau, and spending far more time upon his toilet than he had been in the habit of devoting to it during the last six months. He had ample time to catch the five-o'clock boat, and reached Boston about seven o'clock.

Going directly to a hotel, he had breakfast, after which he started forth, first going to a florist's, where a basket, very like the one sent to Yonkers on a certain fete day so long ago, was ordered. With this snugly packed in a box, he took a Brookline car, the city clocks chiming the hour of ten just as he rolled through Boylston Street, toward the goal of his hopes. He went first to the home of Mrs. Bryant, where Lady Bromley was impatiently awaiting him, her brother having telegraphed her of his coming.

She greeted him almost as fondly as a mother would have greeted a son, then presented him, with no little pride, to her friend.

"Helen, this is 'my Gerald,' and, Gerald, this is my old school friend, who was my confidante at the time of my marriage, the romantic history of which you already know," she remarked, by way of introduction.

"Mabel," cried Mrs. Bryant, flushing, "I fear that knowledge will be a poor recommendation to Mr. Winchester's respect. All the same," she added, with a charming smile, "we have always loved each other very dearly, notwithstanding our early mistakes. But I am not going to keep you here chatting with me. I know what your impatient heart is saying to you, so you are privileged to go your way at once."

Five minutes later he was on his way, with Lady Promley, to Mr. Lyman's residence.

The old gentleman and his stately wife received him with hearty cordiality, their beaming faces plainly indicating that they were in no wise disappointed in the betrothed of the fair girl whom they had learned to love most fondly.

Leaving him with his host and hostess, Lady Bromley, armed with the floral offering, went up-stairs to announce the lover's arrival.

Allison, arrayed in spotless white—a fine cashmere robe handsomely trimmed with soft, fluffy swansdown and reclining upon an elegant couch of pale-blue satin, looked almost too lovely to be mortal as her friend opened the door and entered her room.

But she gave vent to a very mortal little cry of joy as her eager eyes fell upon the basket of forget-me-nots, and eagerly extended her trembling hands for it.

"You perceive that I am the herald of glad tidings, dear," said her ladyship.

"Gerald has come!" Allison murmured, with tremulous lips, a little sob of gladness breaking from her; "and, oh! this basket is almost the exact counterpart of one that he sent me on a certain eventful day ever so long ago. How lovely of him to remember and remind me of it like this! Lady Bromley, let me kiss you for bringing it to me, then please go and send him up just as quickly as you can."

Three minutes later the door opened again, when, with a cry of inexpressible joy, Allison stretched forth her hands to her lover, who for the moment was scarcely less white than the fair girl herself.

"Gerald!"

"Allison!"

The next moment she was sobbing in his arms, which encircled her in an embrace which plainly indicated that from that moment he claimed her as all his own.

(To be continued.)

MIGRATION OF RATS.

Marches of Rodents Observed in Various Countries.

In nearly all countries a seasonal movement of rats from houses and barns to the open fields occurs in spring, and the return movement takes place as cold weather approaches. The movement is noticeable even in large cities.

More general movements of rats often occur. In 1903 a multitude of migrating rats spread over several counties of western Illinois. For several years prior to this invasion no abnormal numbers were seen, and their coming was remarkably sudden. An eyewitness to the phenomenon informed the writer that as he was returning to his home by moonlight he heard a general rustling in the field near by, and soon a vast army of rats crossed the road in front of him, all going in one direction. The mass stretched away as far as could be seen in the dim light. These animals remained on the farms and in the villages of the surrounding country, and during the winter and summer of 1904 were a veritable plague. A local newspaper stated that between March 20 and April 20, 1904, F. U. Montgomery of Preemption, Mercer county, killed 3,435 rats on his farm. He caught most of them in traps.

In 1877 a similar migration occurred into parts of Saline and Lafayette counties, Mo., and in 1904 another came under the writer's observation in Kansas River Valley. This valley for the most part was flooded by the great freshet of June, 1903, and for about ten days was covered with several feet of water. It is certain that most of the rats in the valley perished in this flood. In the fall of 1903 much of the district was visited by hordes of rats, which remained during the winter, and by the following spring had so increased in numbers that serious losses of grain and poultry resulted.

No doubt the majority of the so-called migrations of rodents are in reality instances of unusual reproduction or of enforced migration owing to lack of food. In England a general movement of rats inland from the coast occurs every October. This is closely connected with the closing of the herring season. During the fishing the rodents swarm to the coast, attracted by the offal left from cleaning the herring, and when this food supply fails they hasten back to the farms and villages.

In South America periodic plagues of rats have taken place in Parana, Brazil, at intervals of about thirty years, and in Chile at intervals of from fifteen to twenty-five years. These plagues in the cultivated lands follow the ripening and decay of the dominant species of bamboo in each country. The ripening of the seed furnishes for two or more years a favorite food for rats in the forests, where the animals multiply greatly; when this food fails they are forced to the cultivated districts for subsistence. In 1878 almost the entire crops of corn, rice and manioca in the State of Parana were destroyed by rats, causing a serious famine.

An invasion of black rats in the Bermuda Islands occurred about the year 1615. In a space of two years they had increased so alarmingly that none of the islands was free from them. The rodents devoured everything which came in their way—fruit, plants, and even trees—so that for two years the people were destitute of bread. A law was passed requiring every man in the islands to set twelve traps. In spite of all efforts the animals increased, until they finally disappeared with a suddenness which could have resulted only from a pestilence.

STATE OWNED RAILWAYS.

Record of Annual Deficits and Surplus Complaints.

Government railways are having rather a hard time of it in Europe. The experiment of ownership and aperation by the State, as far as it has been attempted, not only in Europe but elsewhere, seems to have failed, and time and trial more and more demonstrate its inevitable and inherent inefficiency.

Everywhere State operation is criticized, and every year proves it increasingly unsatisfactory to everybody, except the politicians and the functionaries. Thus in Belgium the financial situation has grown so bad that the railway administration is now contemplating what is practically impossible—a substantial increase both in freight and passenger rates. It is that or bankruptcy for the scheme.

In Switzerland Government exploitation regularly works an annual deficit. With less than 3,000 miles of lines the budget for 1906 showed a deficit of about $925,000, and in 1908, of about $1,200,000, without taking account of the interest on the bonded debt amounting to $240,000,000. Government operation in that compact little country, with only about 3,000,000 of inhabitants and an area only about twice that of the State of Massachusetts, has given such unfavorable results that the public are crying out against it, and it promises to be a leading issue in the coming electoral campaign.

In Japan State ownership has proved so disastrous to the finances of the country that the Government is now looking to a syndicate of foreign capitalists to help it out. The statement is made that Government ownership there has imperiled the national finances, prevented railway improvements and checked efficiency of the service.

In Italy the results of the State operation are thus far notoriously bad. The operation results, of course, in an annual deficit, and although the traffic constantly increases, the receipts constantly diminish. During a recent month's operation, out of 1,000 passenger trains 486 were an hour or more late, and there is constant and bitter complaint both from shippers and passengers as to the unsatisfactory character of the service.

In France the least satisfactory operation is that of the State, and in Germany things go from bad to worse, in spite of the strenuous efforts of the Imperial Government, with an exceptionally competent and accomplished general staff of superior railway officials to get around the increasing difficulties and to make a good appearance.

WHAT DID HE MEAN?

Mr. Brown and his family were standing in front of the lion cage.

"John," said Mrs. Brown, "if those animals were to escape, whom would you save first, me or the chaldren?"

"Me," answered John without hesitation.

A graft by any other name is just as apt to land some men behind the bars.

WILD WHITES.

Descendants of Runaway Convicts in Australia.

The wild white men of the vast "Never Never Land" of Northern Australia, to whom the Rev. T. Major is conducting a mission, are known as "white blackfellows," an expression that, while involving a certain contradiction in terms, nevertheless fits them to a nicety.

Some of these voluntary outcasts from their kind are present-day fugitives from justice. Others are the descendants of runaway convicts who "took to the bush" in the bad old days of transportation. They live amongst the aborigines, aping their manners and customs and subsisting on the same always scanty and frequently loathsome food. According to Mr. Major, they are exceedingly shy and difficult of approach, fleeing at the first sign of a "tame" white man.

The mere idea of indivduals of our race and color sinking to this low level is revolting. Yet the Australian white blackfellow has his counterpart in other quarters of the globe, notably in the Guiana hinterland, where whole colonies of white savages are known to be interspersed amongst the bush negroes than whom no more degraded race exists anywhere on earth. Like the wild whites of the Never Never Land, too, these unhappy people descended from runaway convicts, mostly French.

Then, again, there are the small isolated communities of white Indians, so called, which recent research has revealed living at various points near the head-waters of the Amazon. Ethnologists have been completely puzzled as to their origin. They possess the Caucasian features, and in the dialects they speak can be traced many more or less archaic Spanish words and phrases.

This has led to the theory being broached that they are the descendants of some of the followers of Orellana, the discoverer of the Amazon, some hundreds of whom are known to have deserted their leader and wandered aside into the pathless forests during the first stage of his arduous and ever-memorable journey.

PAYING PATTI.

It Was No Joke When She Received 50 Cents a Note.

Adelina Patti never suffered from the financial timidity of a Jenny Lind. Not only was she a supreme vocalist, but, as Col. Mapleson remarked, "no one ever approached her in obtaining from a manager the greatest possible sum he could by any possibility contrive to pay."

The musical miracle was the spoiled darling of her day, says the Bookman, and she never failed to obtain exactly what she wanted. She was first engaged in London in 1861 by Mapleson to sing four nights "on approval" and in case of success to obtain £40 a week.

This contract was not filled, however, for being hard pressed financially she had borrowed £50 from a rival manager and her receipt proved practically a contract. This was the beginning of a career so dazzling that its successive steps are simply a series of increasing bank notes.

In 1872 she obtained in London 200 guineas a night, since she insisted on having more than Christine Nilsson, who was receiving £200. She sang twice a week. Ten years later she got $5,000 a night!

Her famous contract to sing in America provided that the money should be paid her at 2 o'clock on the day she sang, also a drawing room and sleeping car was to be especially built for her with conservatory, fernery, etc. Further, there was to be deposited to her credit $50,000 for payment of the last ten performances—Patti's favorite device. She thus received about twenty times what Mario and Grisi got.

Her private car, incidentally, cost $60,000 and contained a silver bath, and gold keys to the doors—to say nothing of a $2,000 piano. Patti only gave to the manager her voice and her costumes. Her drawing capacity justified this. "Lucia," as an example, was sung to an average of $14,000. "Traviata" drew more, since she sang more notes; it was a frequent occurrence among the poorer music lovers to buy a club ticket and each take turns at hearing her for twenty minutes; if one of them overstayed his time he paid for the entire ticket.

Some mathematicians computed, by dividing number of notes sung by sum paid, that in "Semiramide" Patti received 42⅝ cents for each note; this was found to be just 7 1-10 cents a note more than Rossini got for writing the whole opera.

"Oh, ye-es," remarked Ketchley, in a self-satisfied way, "Lulu and I will start out in married life under very favorable circumstances. Her mother gives us a neat little home, her father furnishes it, and her Uncle de Long has given a carriage and pair. Besides, Lulu has a snug income in her own name." "What part do you furnish?" "Well, principally the name—principally the name."

About the Farm

HINTS FOR FIELD STACKING.

It is necessary to be thinking of the best and cheapest methods for handling the crop. The horse fork in the barn is certainly a very useful implement, one that saves much time and heavy work pitching.

Seldom is this great labor-saving device used when stacking in the fields. One is used in this way on the college farm with great success. It is made as follows: Take one long cedar pole similar to the ordinary telegraph pole; attach three long guy ropes or wire to the top, also the pully and rope that is to be used for hauling the hay. Attach one end of the rope to a tree or firm post. Hitch the horse to the other end of the rope. The pole is now ready for hoisting. Care must be taken to have the hole dug in such a way as to keep the pole from going sideways when hoisting. In starting the stack the bottom should be four feet from the bottom of the pole. The top of the pole should be slanting sideways towards the centre of the stack, as it does not work as well as slanting two ways. When unloading the load should be outside the rope. Should the heavy forkfuls of hay disturb the side of the stack stand a few boards against the side of the stack.

Another plan that is used with success, especially when round stacks are made, is the following: Take three long telegraph poles and fasten them at the top in such a way that they will give a few inches. Next make a shoe eight feet long of 4x6 scantling; attach one to the bottom of each pole. This will admit of a horse being hitched to each when moving to a new locality. When clear of the stack, I would advise attaching to poles a reasonable distance apart to keep them from falling. Two pulleys and a single rope with horse fork attached are all that are necessary for either stackers.—John Fixter, McDonald College.

CHANGE FEED GRADUALLY.

It is fundamentally sound to consult the tastes of animals when endeavoring to get them to eat and digest the greatest amount of feed, says the Breeder's Gazette.

It is not exact to say that it is a mistake to force an animal to acquire an appetite for certain foods. Most animals are notionate in their tastes, just as are people, and they are apt to sniff at new foods. Did you ever notice that farmer at a hotel, where a wide range of provender is offered, including advanced season delicacies which they cannot get at home, generally stick right close to ham and eggs? Appetite is much of a habit. Hence it is sound practice to change feed gradually. In preparing feeds for animals, however, it is certainly desirable to consult their appetites. Much difference of opinion has been expressed over the time to cut timothy for hay. Dean Waters, of the Missouri Agricultural College, submits the results of some very clever work on that point and clinches it with some convincing evidence recorded unconsciously by the animals themselves. Cattle do not care for woody, well-ripened hay when they can get that which is cut at an earlier stage, constitutes a very creditable bit of study of a disputed point.

POULTRY HINTS.

Clean the house daily.

Remove the males from breeding pens.

Separate the growing cockerels from the pullets.

Feed the cockerels a little heavier than the pullets.

Now is a good time to get rid of the surplus old stock.

Better cull out all undesirable old stock so as to give more room to those to be held over during the winter.

Keep the drinking water in the coolest place possible. Sun will quickly affect the water.

See that the houses are properly ventilated at night. To compel fowls to roost in a close, filthy place is a good way to have unhealthy stock.

Cooling, non-fattening foods, plenty of shelter, well-ventilated houses, and cleanly within, should be the order of poultry keeping for the next ninety days.

It is best not to use trap nests during the summer unless they can be looked after every half hour, or the hens may suffer from the confinement.

SOME CONSOLATION.

"Madam," shrieked the excited individual, "your husband has been hurt and they are bringing him home in an ambulance now."

'Are his injuries fatal?" asked his wife.

"No. But his leg is broken."

"Well," replied the woman, "that is one night, I suppose, that he will be home to supper on time."