THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER XVII.

Gerald gently took the two certificates from the hands of his betrothed, carefully refolded and returned them to his wallet. Then he drew her again with in his arms.

"Yes, Allison, it has been proved beyond a doubt that I am Adam Brewster's son. Are you sorry?"

"No, no! I am so glad—so glad!" the fair girl unhesitatingly responded, as she nestled closer to him; "but oh! is not too bad that he could not have known—that you both could not have known the truth when you first went into his office? He would have loved you so—he would have been so proud of you. He was very fond of you, and trusted you as he trusted no one else."

"Yes, I know that, and it has been a great comfort to me," Gerald replied with unsteady lips. "Those words of commendation, almost the first that he ever addressed to me, have been more to me than uncounted gold would be."

"Or course they have, Gerald, and I am so glad, too, that I happened to overhear them, and could repeat them so publicly as I did. I shall never forget how earnestly and kindly he looked at you when he said: 'I would stake my fortune upon your integrity and faithfulness to my interests.'"

"How well you have remembered them, Allison!" said Gerald, bending to kiss the lips that had repeated those words which were so precious to him."

"Why, how could I ever forget them?" she returned, with surprise. "They made me so proud of you, and I just gloried in repeating them in court that day, and seeing the face of the judge light up with that look of gladness which told how thankful he was not to be obliged to sentence you; while John Hubbard looked as if he would have been glad to strangle me for having upset his schemes."

"Allison, I am afraid we are talking too long," Gerald remarked, with some anxiety, for her cheeks were crimson, her eyes shone like stars, and her manner was excited.

"No, indeed. It does not tire me at all to talk, and I a mso happy to be able to go over all these things with you," she returned, with a joyous little laugh. "Isn't it queer, though, that such a little pressure upon my brain could have made my mind a blank for so many months, and that such a simple operation should have restored to me the memory of everything?"

"It is, indeed, and I know of one, at least, who will always be profoundly grateful for that restoration," said her lover earnestly. "The world has been very dark to me, love, ever since last July, until yesterday, when Mr. Lyttleton told me the wonderful news that you were not lost to me."

"Well, I am sure you have told me something almost as wonderful to-day," Allison smilingly responded. "Oh, to think of it—that you are the heir to all papa's money!"

"It is rather startling, I admit," said Gerald. "And now"—with a roguish look into the lovely blue eyes regarding him—"having won my spurs, I shall have no hesitation in taking my bride just as soon as she can be persuaded to appoint the day when she will add the 'Mrs..' to her name. You will not even have to change it, dear."

"H'm! Conditions have changed somewhat since that day when I tried to make you promise that you wouldn't mind about the 'spurs,' retorted Allison, with smiling mockery.

"Indeed, they have."

"They are exactly reversed. I haven't even a clerkship to share with you," said Allison wickedly.

"I am glad of it," returned her lover sententiously.

"Gerald Winchester Brewster, you are a usurper. You have robbed my father's daughter of her fortune, and now you dare affirm that you rejoice in her poverty!" exclaimed Allison, with affected sternness.

"It is no robbery, love; it will all be yours just the same, to use as you like We are only availing ourselves of a caprice of fate and the consequent formalities of law to establish your rights," the young man explained.

"But"—still preserving her mischievous mood—"suppose I should refuse to—to come to you as poor as a church mouse? I don't forget how lofty somebody was about a year ago when somebody else almost unsexed herself, and proposed to share and share alike. Perhaps a certain young lady, who has seemed to sing into a nameless nobody all of a sudden, possesses a spark of the same fire in her nature that once animated an aspiring knight."

"Allison!" exclaimed Gerald, a note of keen pain in his tone, while he bent forward to search the face that was resting against his shoulder, "I hope you are not so wounded as your words seem to imply over these recent revelations which have so turned things topsy-turvy. I would rather a thousand times forego the establishment of my claim as the heir to this fortune than have you experience a single pang."

A merry little laugh interrupted him at this point, and a pair of soft arms stole fondly about his neck.

"You dear, sensitive, self-denying boy! Did you think I really meant a word of all that nonsense? No, indeed, and I am even unmaidenly enough to confess that I am perfectly delighted with the present arrangement. I wouldn't have it changed for the world; for since you are so generous-hearted as to wish to endow a certain poverty-stricken little waif with all you possess, there will now be nothing to keep us apart any longer. The world would probably be shocked at such a confession, and cry 'immodest! mercenary!' But what care I? I am only hungry to be loved, and for a home where we can be all in all to each other."

"My darling!" whispered Gerald delightedly. "I might have known that you were in jest—that you would never maliciously twit upon facts. And we shall make a home just as soon as the lawsuit is ended. Where shall it be, Allison?"

"Oh, in the old house, during the winter, Gerald," she eagerly replied. "Then we must spend some part of each year at Lakeview, where you proved yourself such a hero—I cannot give up either of those dear places. But that villa at Newport I never want to enter again; that dreadful man has poisoned its atmosphere for me. Sell it, Gerald, and we will find some other summer home."

"You shall have everything your own way, my darling, and you could not have pleased me better than to choose, as you have done, to live in the old familiar places, where I have been in the habit of seeing you and father—my father! How strange it seems to say it, Allison, and it is the first time I have ever called him so," Gerald concluded, flushing from mingled emotions as he referred to Mr. Brewster in this way.

"How very sad and mysterious the separation of your father and mother was!" Allison thoughtfully observed. "I cannot believe that papa intended to do his young wife any wrong, for he was a good man through and through; but his apparent desertion of her is to me most strange."

"So it seemed to me at first," Gerald replied, "but, as I have thought more about it, I cannot help feeling that if my mother had lived, all would eventually have been well with them. There is certainly something very mysterious about their relations, but the erection of that monument over my mother's grave proves to me that he never wilfully repudiated her during her life, and was determined that no reproach should be entailed upon her memory. But by the way, Allison," he added, with a sudden thought, "how do you suppose it happened that one of the other victims of that accident was reported as Miss Brewster?"

"Oh, I imagine my card-case was accountable for that mistake. It was probably found lying beside some one else, and so it was taken for granted that the person was Miss Brewster."

"But, of course, the lady's friends would know better than that when they identified her," objected Gerald.

"True, and yet the reporter's account may have been written before the poor thing was identified, and thus he never discovered his mistake; or, even if he did, he may not have thought it worth while to rectify it. I should really like to know who the girl was," Allison concluded thoughtfully.

Later the lovers joined the family below, and a pleasant, social evening followed, although Gerald considerately took his leave at an early hour, having first arranged, if the following day should prove to be fine, to take Allison for a drive.

It did prove to be an ideal winter day, and snugly esconced among abundant robes, the lovers spent a couple of hours driving. The remainder of the day was quietly passed with the Lymans and Lady Bromley, Gerald only leaving in season to catch the evening express for New York.

It was arranged before he left, however, that as soon as Allison should be pronounced strong enough to endure the trip, she should accompany Lady Bromley back to New York and remain with her until the lawsuit was decided, when the young couple would immediately be married.

The Lymans expressed a great deal of regret at the thought of parting with her, for she had grown to seem almost like a daughter to them, but, of course, they could not fail to rejoice most heartily, in view of her recovery and her flattering prospects for the future; while, as they were in the habit of frequently visiting New York, they were comforted with the thought that they could thus see her often.

The day after Gerald's departure, Ellen Carson was permitted to pay Allison a call(and it was very touching to witness the girl's heartfelt joy over the restoration of her youthful benefactress.

"I never was so glad about anything in my life!" she exclaimed, with a beaming face, as she reverently took the dainty white hand which Allison extended to her; "and you're going to get your money all back too, ain't you?" she concluded, with eager interest.

"Yes, I expect it will all come to me," the fair invalid smilingly responded, but not thinking it necessary to explain just how the fortune was going to be restored to her.

"Well, I reckon I can help them do a little fighting on that law-lawsuit," said Ellen, with an air of importance. "I've always hankered to do something for you, ever since you gave me those ten dollars, and now I'm going to tell all I know, to make those greedy thieves shell out what they stole from you."

Allison smiled at her original remarks, but thanked her, and told her that she felt sure that everything would end all right.

A day or two after Gerald's return from his visit to Boston, he received a note from the chief officer of the bank where he had served so long under Mr. Brewster.

A new president and other officers had been appointed, and the concern was being managed on a different basis. The writer of the note asked Gerald if he would kindly step around to the bank at his earliest convenience, as there was a matter of business upon which he wished to consult him.

Accordingly, the following morning the young man presented himself in the private office of the president, when that gentleman informed him that he wished to be instructed how to gain access to the secret vault which he understood the former president had had constructed for his individual use, but as no one in the bank knew where it was located, he had taken the liberty to send for him to give him the information.

"I want just such a place for my own convenience," he observed. "I have spent hours searching for it, but without success, and I confess that my curiosity regarding this clever hiding-place has become almost a mania," he concluded, smiling.

"Have you Mr. Brewster's keys?" Gerald inquired, but with a thrill of repulsion as he recalled the experiences of that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday when he had come there to execute his secret commission.

"Yes; here they are," his companion replied, as he took from a drawer the identical ring which the late banker had given him during his last interview with him. "This is the key to the secret vault," said Gerald, singling out from the others the tiny bit of steel.

"Yes, I imagined so; but as yet I have been unable to discover any lock which it will fit," the banker responded.

"I can let you into the secret very shortly if you will come with me to the vault," our hero observed, whereupon they proceeded directly to the place.

The drawer which had been Mr. Brewster's individual receptacle for important papers was drawn forth, when, by the light of a candle, Gerald pointed out the narrow slot in the panel behind which was the secret vault.

(To be continued.)

TOO MUCH MACHINERY.

A little chap was offered a chance to spend a week in the country, but refused.

Coaxing, pleading, arguing, promising of untold wonders, alike brought from him nothing but the stubborn ultimatum, "No country for me!"

"But why not?" someone asked finally.

"Because," he responded, "they have threshin' machines down there, an' it's bad enough here where it's done by hand."

FRENCH WOMEN ECONOMICAL

Economizing is a real passion with all French persons, and they carry the idea into their wardrobe as well as into other departments of their houses. As every one knows, there is no neater-looking or better-dressed woman in the world than a French woman, and yet extravagance finds no place in her toilette. It is the way a dress is kept when not in service, and it is the way a dress is put on, too, that tells the tale.

AMEER OF AFGHANISTAN

STORIES OF HABIBULLAH, THE PRESENT RULER.

His Plucky Action Quelled a Mutiny—How He Escaped Being Poisoned.

There is wild excitement in Afghanistan in consequence of the discovery of a plot to poison the Ameer, the Heir Apparent, and other members of the Royal family; and it is rumored that Bibi Halima, one of the widows of the late Ameer Abdur Rahman, is one of the leaders of the conspiracy.

The whole trouble arises from the habit common amongst Oriental potentates of providing themselves with a number of wives.

REGARDED AS THE HEIR.

Abdur Rahman had quite a lot, and each wife spent her days scheming to get her son recognized as the heir to the throne. But Abdur Rahman was a very wise old man.

"It has frequently happened," he said, "in the past that the life of the heir has been endangered; and, consequently, I prefer to conceal my intentions as long and as far as I can."

He, therefore, refused to say which of his sons he would choose to succeed him, but it was considered that the choice lay between Habibullah, the eldest of them all, Nasrullah, and Omar, whose mother, Bibi Halima, was the most powerful of Abdur Rahman's wives, and who has now been charged with conspiracy.

Addur Rahm, however, made it very plain by his official actions that he regarded Habibullah as his heir.

Whenever the Ameer had to leave Kabul, Habibullah was appointed a sort of regent for the time being, and once a week, even while the Ameer was in Kabul, Habibullah held a reception which all his brothers and half-brothers were compelled to attend.

He particularly won his father's approval by his conduct during a mutiny that occurred in one of these terms of regency. Some of the soldiers of the Kandahar-Hazara battalion became unmanageable under some fancied grievance, and, the trouble spreading, a serious mutiny broke out.

Habibullah rode alone into the midst of the rebellious soldiers without showing any fear of their injuring him, coming, as he did, without any body-guard. His plucky action worked the soldiers up to a passion of enthusiasm, and the mutiny melted away.

ON HIS FATHER'S DEATH

he succeeded him without difficulty, though there was some fear that Bibi Halima would cause trouble by pressing the claims of her son, Omar. Her intrigues were unsuccessful, however, and Habibullah seems to have treated his stepmother and her son more kindly than they can reasonably have expected.

Not very long ago a special and very liberal allowance was granted to them. But for all that, for the last eight years, and particularly during the visit of the Ameer to India, Omar and his mother and another brother, Nasrullah, have been plotting his overthrow.

Habibullah is a very enlightened ruler, but some of his methods of government have a very Eastern ring about them. For instance, not long ago three officials were brought to him charged with taking bribes, and the Ameer ordered them to be buried alive!

His Majesty was recently suffering from a sharp attack of gout. The native Court doctors resorted to their usual remedy of bleeding, with the result that the Royal patient grew worse instead of better.

The Court Chamberlain, who had been sitting up for several nights with his sleepless master, and who was in the state known as "fit to drop," heard with joy of a Babu hospital assistant who happened to be in Kabul. He sent for him at once, and asked him to prepare a sleeping draught to be administered to the Ameer.

SLAVE WENT TO SLEEP.

The Babu made up sufficient for several doses, and the Chamberlain carried the bottle to the Ameer.

Habibullah, who takes no risks, summoned one of his slaves and poured half the contents of the bottle down the unhappy man's throat. The result was that the slave went so thoroughly to sleep that he never woke again. The Babu was sent for.

"One-half of this," said the Ameer, holding up the bottle, "killed my servant Abdullah. The other half, by the grace of Allah, has been preserved. Drink thou, and may thy sleep be sound!"

The wretched Babu expostulated in vain, and he had no choice but to obey. Later, behind the scenes, someone kindly administered an emetic, and his life was saved. The Babu immediately packed up and left Kabul, never to return.

Love is a disease that nothing short of marriage will cure.

WHEN J. B. GETS ANXIOUS.

Naval Scares Have Thrown John Bull Into Fits.

The present naval scare is not the only one that has startled John Bull out of the usual state of placid equanimity he maintains in regard to such matters.

Indeed, his 1909 attack of the jumps is but a flea-bite by comparison with that of 1884, when, owing to the exposures of a certain evening newspaper, he became suddenly convinced that his vaunted supremacy in ships and guns existed on paper only.

His alarm and anger upon that occasion knew no bounds, culminating, some six months afterwards, in his kicking out of office the Government responsible, and this notwithstanding the fact that large and important additions to the Navy had been authorized in the meantime.

Precisely ten years later another similar revelation led to the founding of the Navy League.

One of the earliest naval scares occurred in 1652, when the Dutch Admiral Van Tromp sailed through the Straits of Dover with a broom at his masthead, to denote that he had swept the English from the seas. The rough-and-ready insolence of the proceeding stirred men's blood, and in a trice battleships were building in every suitable port and inlet from John o' Groat's to Land's End, while inland forest and dell rang unceasingly with the sound of innumerable axes being laid to the roots of the sturdy oaks that were to furnish timber for the new English Navy, destined presently to destroy that belonging to Holland, and its too presumptuous commander along with it.

Another big naval scare, due to our then crack battleship, the Captain, having turned turtle in the Bay of Biscay, occurred in 1870. It resulted in the introduction of a new type of vessel, the Monarch, whose reserve of equilibrium was 16 to 1 as compared with that of the Captain class. This was obviously going to the other extreme.

But such, unfortunately, is the usual result of these popular panics. This one gave us ships shaped like cheese-boxes, as safe as they were slow, and withal tremendous "coal-eaters."

Fortunately for us we were not at war while they held the seas.—Pearson's Weekly.

THE FIRST ROAD-MAKERS.

Herds of Buffaloes Tramped Over the Plains.

The buffalo was a good surveyor. It did not reason out why it should go in a certain direction, but its sure instinct took it by the easiest and most direct paths, over high lands and low, to the salt-licks and watercourses which were its goal. The authors of "The Story of the Great Lakes," Edward Channing and M. F. Lansing, say that the buffalo observed something like the principles which to-day govern the civil engineer.

As soon as the explorer landed on the southern shores of Lakes Erie, Michigan and Superior, he came upon buffalo roads or "traces." Sometimes these were narrow ditches, a foot wide and from six inches to two feet deep, trodden down by the impact of thousands of hoofs, as herd after herd of buffaloes had stamped along in single file behind their leaders.

When the first path became too deep for comfort, because of repeated travel, the buffaloes would abandon it and begin a second path alongside the first, and thus the frequented traces would be gradually widened.

Again, an immense herd of these heavy animals would crash through the forest, breaking in their rapid progress a broad, deep road from one feeding-ground to another. As this route would be followed again and again by this and other herds, it would become level and hard as a rock, so that there was great rejoicing in pioneer settlement when the weary road-makers, struggling with log causeways and swampy hollows, came upon a firm, solid buffalo trace. Nor was this an uncommon experience.

The line of many of these roads is followed to-day by our railroads and canals, as it was followed by our long roads and turnpikes.

The buffalo follows the level of the valley; he swerved round high points whenever it was possible, crossing the ridges and watersheds at the best natural divides and gorges; and he crossed from one side of a stream of water to the other repeatedly in order to avoid climbing up from the level, after the fashion of our modern loop railways.

THE HARD PART.

It's hard to live within one's salary, but there's one consolation—it's harder to live without it.

"The lady whose name you gave as a reference, my girl," said a lady to an applicant for a situation, "tells me you were not always truthful and obedient." "No, ma'am," was the reply; "I couldn't be with her tellin' me all the time to say she wasn't at home!"

About the Farm

FOR AND ABOUT POULTRY.

A good insecticide can be made by putting a pint of kerosene in a gallon of whitewash.

One good breed of chickens on a farm is worth more than ten different breeds.

When mud and slush cover the chicken lot and pens great care must be taken to avoid rheumatism among the fowls. A little straw thrown on the floor and over the yards may hinder serious trouble in the flock.

Pulverized charcoal should be set where the fowls may partake of it when desired. Besides brightening the plumage it is a conditioner that has few equals.

Unless checked in time chicken lice will multiply with almost incredible rapidity. A hundred will increases to a million if not eradicated before they get a good start.

Learn to profit by your mistakes. If you made a mistake last year try not repeat it. Success in the poultry business is largely due to avoiding past mistakes and the mistakes of others.

A spoonful of kerosene should always be kept in the drinking water at this time of the year. Many diseases are held in check in this way. The fowl gets a little of the oil every time it gets a drink.

The chicken crop is considered by the average poultry raiser as a small issue, hardly worthy of consideration or deserving of thoughtful attention, and, true to the law of compensation, fowls under such management yield no more profit than is commensurate with what has been accorded them.

In speaking of the droppings as an indicator of the health of the flock, the dropping should be of consistency to hold their shape, but should not be solid. In color they should be dark, tapering off into greyish and white. If the droppings are dark with red splashes of mucous in them feed less meat. If the droppings are soft or pasty and yellowish or browrish, feed more meat and less starchy food. In case of greenish, watery diarrhoea you should investigate the sanitary conditions and the water supply.

DANISH BUTTER.

A Scottish farmer, who has made a study of dairy cond tions in Denmark, gives the following as the chief reasons why Danish butter is uniform and good:

1. The cows receive roots all winter and thus the butter is soft and not hard and dry, as when fed on hay and cakes alone.

2. The milk when it comes into the factory must be pasteurized to 185 degrees F. and by this means turnips and other flavors are got rid of.

3. The cream is cooled to about 64 degrees F. and a starter of lactic acid used. The cream is only kept for 24 hours. Thus it will be seen that when the starter is there and the cream only kept for a short period, no bad flavors can raise.

4. The barrels the day before being used are steamed, and the inside receives a coating of moist lime, which is washed off next day before the butter is put in and after washing, the barrels are rubbed with salt. Thus the odor from the wood is to a large extent prevented and does not flavor the outside of the butter.

The paper which lines the barrels is steeped in salt water for two days before use; also the churns, butter workers and cream tubs are coated with moist lime after the cream has been washed off. This is allowed to remain on for about ten minutes, when it is washed off with boiling water.

All barrels have printed on the outside, "Danish Butter" along with the registered number of the dairy it came from, so that if there were any complaints they could be traced right back to the dairy the butter came from.

FLY-SCREENED MILK.

"Screen your dairies against flies" is the warning which has been sent out to the dairymen who send milk to the district of Columbia, U. S. A., by Health Officer W. C. Woodward

Concerning the screening of dairies the letter says:

"The department considers that under the above section all dairy rooms are required to be effectually screened against flies. Flies whose habits cause them to visit places where filth abounds, such as manure piles and other accumulations of refuse are known to carry not only small particles of refuse or filth on their bodies and legs, but also to carry other contaminating matter such as germs which cause disease. Thus by excluding the flies from your dairy you remove a source of contamination by dirt and disease germs, both of which are liable to alter unnecessarily the quality of your milk."

The fact that a man has the sleeping in-church habit is no sign that he will find rest in heaven.