THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The key was inserted, turned half-round, and the mystery was instantly solved as that painted iron plate sprang outward from its place.

"Aha! that is indeed a very clever arrangement!" remarked the president, in a tone of satisfaction; "and I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Winchester, for taking the trouble to come to point it out to me!"

"You are very welcome, sir," Gerald courteously replied.

"I wonder if there is anything in the place now?" said the other gentleman curiously.

"I am quite sure there is not," said Gerald. "Mr. Brewster did not mention anything but the two boxes when he commissioned me to come here for them."

"It cannot do any harm to investigate," the banker observed, as he thrust his hand deep into the aperture. "Aha!" he suddenly ejaculated again, in a tone of triumph, when, upon drawing it forth, Gerald espied a small book clasped in his fingers.

Bringing the light to bear upon it, they saw there was a label on the cover.

"Notes of European travel, 18—," the gentleman read aloud. Gerald started violently, the hot color rising over his face.

That was the very year of his mother's marriage.

"May I look at it, sir?" he questioned, with repressed excitement.

"Certainly—certainly," said his companion, as he cheerfully passed it to him.

With a hand that trembled visibly, Gerald opened it and hastily scanned a few pages here and there, his heart beating with great, startled throbs as he read.

"Mr. Bancroft," he at length remarked, "I believe that this little book will prove to be of the most vital importance in the forthcoming contest for the Brewster fortune, and with your permission I will take it to Mr. Lyttleton."

"Certainly you have my permission. I have no right whatever to the book, and if there is anything in it that will bring that rascally guardian of the late Mr. Brewster's pretty daughter to justice and give the rightful heirs the property, no one will be more glad that I. I have believed from the first that the man was guilty of the foulest fraud. That was a sad fate the poor little girl met with!" Mr. Bancroft responded.

It had been thought best not to reveal the facts regarding Allison's wonderful escape and recovery until she should appear in court to confront the man who had so deeply wronged her.

The young man then bade the banker good morning, and, with the priceless little book buttoned close against his heart, hurried back to Mr. Lyttleton's office.

"What on earth is the matter, Gerald?" that gentleman exclaimed the moment he opened the door; "you look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"I have—a very tangible ghost of the past," said the young man, with repressed excitement. "I believe that I have in my possession all missing links connected with my mother's history, and ample material, as well, to solve the mystery of my father's apparent desertion of her."

And eagerly drawing forth the precious book which had been discovered in the secret vault, he laid it before his friend, and explained where and how he had come by it.

"Gerald, if that is the case, you are a lucky fellow," cried Mr. Lyttleton, starting up, all on the alert.

"But here," he added, after glancing at the label and passing it back; "you must first read it by yourself—there may be some things in it that no one but yourself should know."

Gerald stood regarding it a moment with an air of indecision. Then he took it mechanically, and, sitting down at his desk, opened it and began to read.

The first entry in the book, which was evidently a diary, had been made on shipboard, and read thus:

"Germanic, 8 p.m., June 28, 18—. Sailed at 12 M., but I am blamed if I like the way in which I have been hustled off; but father insisted that I must join mother in Paris by the eigth of July, and no other vessel would leave in season. I'm deuced lonesome, in spite of the fact that the governor sent Tom, his valet, along with me—to preserve the importance of the family, I suppose. since we are going to the North Cape with a swell crowd. Bah! I abominate style, and I've no earthly use for a valet. Poor M.! It was tough on both of us, when we had everything planned for such a cozy time all by ourselves. The Germanic is a dandy boat, every convenience, fast sailer, first-class table. The only thing lacking is the heart to enjoy it all; but that I've left behind me."

Every day of the ensuing voyage was noted, various items of interest recorded, the captain, crew, and passengers described, and in almost every entry there was also some allusion to "M.," which plainly revealed a heart hungering for some loved presence.

On the last day at sea there was this record:

"Have written a long letter to my dear girl over yonder, which I shall mail the moment we land; but I feel as if I can hardly wait for the next vessel to arrive, when I shall surely hear from her."

There was nothing of special interest for several pages, until, under date ten days later, in Paris, Gerald read:

"No letter! What can it mean? Tom brought me in a whole pile this morning, but not the one I wished for above all others. Surely M. could not have neglected to write, knowing that I would be wild with anxiety if I did not hear from her by every steamer."

Page after page Gerald turned, searching for these significant allusions to the dear one so reluctantly left behind.

There were various bright and animated accounts of people, places and things. Paris was described in a vivacious way, which betrayed that the writer thoroughly appreciated the gay city and its inhabitants. The affectionate welcome received from his mother and other friends who were to comprise the party which was going to the "land of the midnight sun" was faithfully and vividly recorded; but through all there ran that plaintive note—"No letter from M."

The reader followed the writer through Norway and Sweden, and many other places en route, and his own heart ached in sympathy with that of the impatient and unwilling tourist, whose hopes were never realized.

It was evident that his anxiety so preyed upon his mind that he was at times really ill on account of it, for mention was frequently made of having been "laid up for a day or two," and also of his mother's annoyance at having her trip interrupted because of it.

Their tour had evidently been extended far beyond the time at first determined upon, for months were passed in traveling from place to place.

Mention was made several times of a determination to break away from the party and go directly home—the "anxiety and suspense were becoming intolerable"; but these resolutions were always apparently overruled by the entreaties or commands of his mother.

At last there came an entry that was almost paralyzing, for it comprised but one word, and was the only one upon the page:

"Dead!"

The next entry was two days later, and read thus:

"Good heavens! How have I lived since receiving those home papers? Who could have sent me that New Haven paper with that paragraph marked? It looks as if some one had discovered our secret, and was flaunting it with cruel spite in my face. Dead! my darling dead! No, no! I cannot—will not believe it. And yet there it is in black and white, and branded on my brain in letters of fire: 'We learn with deep regret of the recent death, of quick consumption, of Miss Miriam Harris, who was a beautiful and talented young lady, and a resident of this city for many years.' That is all—vague, mysterious, maddening! Where did she die, and when, and who cared for her? There is no date given! I shall go mad! I must go home at once, to learn the truth. Oh, my love! my love!"

The record ended abruptly here, and for upward of six weeks nothing more was written in the diary.

Then the journal was resumed, in London:

"Have been ill for many weeks, and would have been glad if the end had come; but my dreary life seems likely to be prolonged indefinitely. I thank the fates, however, that my mother is at last weary of wandering, and we are to go home some time within the next fortnight."

The next entry of any interest to Gerald was made on shipboard:

"Have been terribly seasick for two days—something unusual for me; but when the body suffers, the heart lets up a little. Went on deck for a while this afternoon, and met a Miss Porter and her sister. The latter's a sweet little blonde who reminds me strongly of M. They are returning from a visit to some friends in England."

Three days afterward occurred this:

"Had an enjoyable promenade on the upper deck with little Miss Porter. She is a very winning little body—she appeared to divine at once that I had some secret sorrow, and her manner was full of a gentle, indescribable sympathy. She makes me think of M. more and more."

There was nothing additional for a couple of weeks, and then there were three or four pages that were full of fire and passion:

"Made a discovery to-day that has almost made a murderer of me, and I must let off steam, or do some desperate deed. I have been hoodwinked for months. I have been the victim of the most diabolical plot that was ever conceived against a human being. My father, by some means unknown to me, discovered the fact of my marriage to M. some time last summer, and, instead of ranting and tearing and denouncing me, he craftily set himself at work to part us, and he succeeded but too well. He planned that trip abroad to Norway, Sweden, and all those other tiresome places for the sole purpose of getting me out of the way, to enable him to mature some scheme to separate me from my darling. Alas! grief and death aided him in this but too effectually; for, of course, she must have grieved herself to death over the belief that I had cruelly deserted her.

"The cat was let out of the bag in a strange way. I wanted Tom to do an errand for me this morning and when he did not answer the bell I set about hunting him up. I found him in his own room, overhauling his trunk. He had just turned it upside down as I entered, and among a lot of rubbish I espied a letter that had a familiar look. I captured it. It was one that I had given him to mail to M. when I first reached London. I pounced upon him like a cat upon a mouse, and demanded the meaning of it. At first he swore that it must have got into his trunk by mistake. But my suspicions being aroused frightened the fellow almost to death, and he confessed that, by my father's orders, he had intercepted every letter addressed to New Haven. He could easily do this, as it had always been his duty to attend to the mailing of all letters, as well as to the collecting of them, wherever we went.

"Having gleaned that much from him, I went downstairs and faced my father, and we had it out between us, hot and heavy. He saw that the truth must come, and he concealed nothing. He had heard of my attentions to M. while I was in college, and he commissioned some one to watch me; but it was only when I was on the point of graduating that he learned that I was actually married to her. He was in a terrible rage at first; he could not endure the scandal of such a misalliance, for he at once set his wits to work to find some way for me out of the scrape. Hence his plot and his orders to go abroad. Tom, the valet, was sent along to act, with my mother, as a spy, and with instructions to intercept every letter that was mailed to or sent from New Haven. This he felt sure would result in making M. feel that she had been deserted in cold blood if kept up long enough, and so he rested and left matters to take their own course for a while.

"At length he thought the time ripe for action, and he went to see her and try to browbeat her into suing for a divorce upon the ground of desertion. But she had disappeared from New Haven, and no one could tell him anything about her. Later he received a paper from his spy in New Haven, and found, to his great relief, that it contained a notice of M.'s death. That settled everything. I was free, and there was no further need of making excuses to keep me abroad. The same mail that bore that fatal paper to me contained a letter to my mother bidding her come home, a summons which she would gladly have obeyed immediately, but for my long illness. This is the cursed story which I wrung from my father. When it was finished I left the house in a white heat of passion, swearing that I would never enter it again."

Two days later:

"Have been to New Haven to seek some tidings of my dear one. Could get no trace of her. She left the little house on —— Street some time during the winter. The place was sold shortly after, and nothing was ever known of her afterward except the fact of her death. Then I went to Ashton, a little town in Rhode Island, where I knew her parents were buried. Ah, me! There I found a new-made grave, which told its own sad story. My heart was torn asunder again, and I came away without asking a single question. Am sorry now, though, that I did not hunt up the sexton and get the date of her death and burial, but that I can do later."

Two months after, and written at the Parker House, Boston, Mass.:

"Came to Boston on the tenth to attend the wedding of an old chum. Met the Porter sisters again. Miss Alice, strangely enough, was a bridesmaid. She is really a charming girl, and has promised to correspond with me."

There were various entries after this, but nothing of especial importance until at the end of three months, when the following was written:

"The governor died this morning; sent for me last night, and begged my forgiveness for the wrong done me. I tried to be kind, but in my heart I could not forgive him; but I promised him that I would always care for my mother. He has left everything to me, and I am to carry on the banking business just the same as he had done for the last twenty years."

There was very little more relating to Gerald's mother, although the diary was continued irregularly for more than a year. Then there was a skip of nearly two years before another date was added, and that was the last record in the book:

"To-morrow I am going to marry lovely Alice Porter. She is very like my lost one, and I have grown very fond of her. I have never told her of my marriage, and I never shall. It is an episode in my life which I believe no one else living knows anything about. Life once more looks very inviting to me, and I will try to atone by my devotion to Alice for the great mistake which I made three years ago. Secret marriages are a device of his satanic majesty to trap the unwary and ruin the lives of innocent girls. Now, good-bye, my companion of many sorrowful hours! I should never have had you but for my promise to M. to keep a diary while I was abroad. I shall never talk to you again, for I am going to burn you as soon as the fire is lighted in my office in the morning, and so end forever the first volume of my life, which no one must ever read. I trust the sequel will bring me happier days."

(To be continued.)

SEEDS A CENT APIECE.

They're From Ginseng Though and Are Mighty Scarce.

Ginseng seeds are worth one cent apiece or from eighty to one hundred dollars a pound. Dried root is worth $6.25 a pound.

When first growing from the seed the ginseng plants have two forks or stalks and one leaf on each stalk. The second year it adds another leaf on each part and the third year the plant grows in three parts with three leaves on each part and this year a seed ball forms.

This grows direct from the main stalk of the plant and from four to five inches above the foliage. The average plant, says a writer in Outing, produces from fifty to sixty seeds. Wild plants yield better than cultivated.

The fourth and fifth years one leaf is added to each stalk. The fifth year the plant is full grown, having three forks and five leaves on each stalk. It grows from one to two feet in height; some times as high as twenty-seven inches. The leaves are broad and flat, about four inches long and two inches wide when full grown with escalloped edges.

It takes five years to grow the root from seed for market and eighteen months to germinate the seed for growth. There is more cultivated root now on the market than wild. The plants are found on high, dry land in the woods and never in swampy places.

If actions speak louder than words, what a lot of noise deaf mutes must make when they talk.

In after years, when a man's wife springs an old love letter on him that he wrote, he is apt to sneak up an alley and try to kick himself.

Lady Teacher (drowsily)—"What is it, Tom?" Tom—"Jimmy's swearing!" Lady Teacher (still drowsily)—"What did he say?" (Pause.) Tom—"Well, miss, if you say over all the bad words you know, I'll tell you when you come to it!"

Dora—"And so you quarrelled?" Lottie—"Yes; and I returned all his presents. And what do you think he did?" "Something horrid, I'm sure." "He sent me half-a-dozen boxes of face powder, with a note explaining that he thought he had taken as much as that home on his coat since he first knew me."

IN MERRY OLD ENGLAND

NEWS BY MAIL ABOUT JOHN BULL AND HIS PEOPLE.

Occurrences in the Land That Reigns Supreme in the Commercial World.

There were recently seven suicides in twelve days at Leicester.

It is proposed to raise a memorial to the late Sir W. H. Curzon Wyllie.

Lieut.-General Sir Leslie Rundle has been appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Malta.

Thousands of eggs were destroyed in a fire which damaged a chicken incubator establishment at Plymouth recently.

An unsigned donation of $125,000 was received for the Queen Alexandra Sanitarium at Davos (High Alps), for British consumptives.

Mr. Claude Hay is to introduce a bill into the House of Commons to make further provision for the expulsion of aliens convicted of certain offences.

The late Mr. Ellis Abraham Franklin of Porchester Terrace, Hyde Park, London, and of the banking firm of Samuel Montagu & Co., left $120,000 to charity.

The official returns for June show an improvement in trade in Britain. Both imports and exports are higher, and considerably higher than they were last June.

An expanse of 250 acres at Castle Bromwich has been acquired as a playing ground by the Birmingham and District Housing Reform and Open Spaces Association.

A respectably dressed woman did $650 damage to plate glass windows along the Strand, London. She had a piece of gas piping strapped to her wrist when arrested.

When searched in a London police court, a female shoplifter was found to be wearing a "shoplifter's" apron, a garment with capacious pockets worn beneath the dress skirt.

Royal Humane Society medals were presented at Bristol recently to Wm. Jones and John Gane, corporation workmen, for rescuing an unconscious comrade from a sewer manhole.

Work has been begun by the London, Tilbury, and Southend Railway Company on a new station which will enable passengers to join or leave the main line trains at Upminster.

Several women and children were bruised in rushing out of the Hippodrome, Blyth, Northumberland, where a cinematograph fire, although it was easily extinguished, caused a panic.

Owing to an accident at Blaensychan colliery, near Newport (Mon.), recently, a cage containing 20 men was for a time suspended in the shaft; 700 other men declined to work in consequence.

An offer by an unknown gentleman to give twenty-five prizes of 10s. each to the tidiest children in the schools was accepted by the Education Committee of the London County Council.

Lord Kinnaird recently turned the first sod on the site of the new headquarters of the Young Men's Christian Association at the corner of Tottenham Court road and Great Russell street.

At the baptism of the twin children of Mr. and Mrs. A. Gillingham, at Kirkham, near Preston, the father's twin sisters acted as godmothers, and the mother's twin brothers were godfathers.

Britain and France have concluded an agreement, Mr. Gladstone announces, by which a British workman in France will get compensation for accidents there and similarly a French worker in Britain.

More than 1,700 prison officers have subscribed to the fund raised for Miss Rogerson, former matron of Reading Prison, London, who was recently injured by a woman prisoner throwing vitrol over her.

In the presence of a large number of showmen, the funeral took place recently, at Tow Law, Durham, of Mr. Walter Scott, proprietor of a well-known travelling circus, who at the age of fifteen received a command to appear before the late Queen Victoria.

WHAT RABBITS COST AUSTRALIA.

The rabbit is an expensive little animal. A return has just been presented to the Parliament of Queensland showing how much the destruction of the pest has cost that State. The figure is a tidy one—£1,252,591. Until the early '60s there were no rabbits in Australia. Then some malignant fate prompted a squatter to import a few for sporting purposes. These became the progenitors of countless millions, and the "rabbit plague" brought about the ruin of thousands of farmers. The prize of £5,000 for an effective exterminator has never been won. Among those who had a shot for it was M. Pasteur.

RARE EXCEPTION.

"I rather pride myself on one thing," said the young father. "Although I have the brightest, smartest, cutest, best youngster, I ever saw, I never brag about him."

About the Farm

SPRAYING POTATOES.

As is well known, both early and late blight on potatoes are much less prevalent in dry than in wet seasons. In the State of New York the season of 1908 was dry throughout, and late blight was practically unknown; nevertheless, the conclusion of the Experimental Station, Geneva, N. Y., is that even in dry years it pays to spray with poisoned Bordeaux. This conclusion was reached from observation, not only that of their own experiments, but also those of farmers in different parts of the states who joined with them in conducting experiments after the fashion of the experimental union at Guelph, Ont.

In the words of a report from the Geneva Station: "It is unwise to neglect spraying in dry seasons. Even when there is no blight, five or six sprayings should be made during the season. In dry weather the wounding of the leaves by bugs, flea beetles, and other insects, is more injurious than in wet weather. It is an established fact that through spraying at a proper time will lessen the damage done by flea beetles. If flea beetles are not at least partially checked by spraying with Bordeaux mixture, it is positive proof that the work has been done properly. With us the opinion is steadily growing that very few farmers spray thoroughly enough to secure the maximum profit from the operation. There seems to be little danger of overdoing the matter." There were gains of from 30 bushels and upwards per acre, even in the dry season of 1908, as a result of spraying with Bordeaux, compared with areas on which insecticides only were applied.

AN EFFECTIVE WEED DESTROYER.

With the introduction of improved spraying machinery and better methods of manufacture, sulphur of iron is coming more and more into use as an effective weed destroyer. Formerly when applied with a brush, any solution for the purpose would form in large drops, or in smaller drops which would form large ones and drop off. Now, with the improved sprayer which are available, a spray is made that settles down on the stems and leaves of the weed and stays there.

Many farmers do not realize the extent of damage done to crops by weeds. It is stated that every ton of dry matter produced on a field five hundred tons of water is taken from the soil and discharged into the air, water that is needed for the growth of the legitimate crop. It is clear then how important it is that the weeds be destroyed.

Where crop rotation is possible, weeds are not so much of a menace, but crop rotation, as a means of weed destruction, is not always possible on account of climatic and labor conditions. For instance, rotation calls for a money crop, and a manurial crop as well as a cleaning crop. The cleaning crop—corn, potatoes, beets, etc., cannot be used over great areas on account of labor and market conditions. So it appears that spraying must remain the only practical means of weed destruction for many years to come, or until our population increases to the point where our vast prairie lands are held as small farms, making crop rotation practicable.

Sulphate of iron is a by-product in the manufacture of wire and is put up for the market in convenient-sized sacks like plasters, instead of coming in huge crystals as formerly.—American Farm Review.

DEHORNING CATTLE.

Rather than to cause cattle to suffer the tortures of pain by having their horns removed after they have attained their normal growth and owing to the fact that it is an advantage that an animal be dehorned in order to protect them from each other, it is advisable to prevent their horns from growing.

This can be successfully done by clipping the hair off of the little knobs where the horns appear and carefully applying a dehorning preventative to a small surface not to exceed the size of a quarter of a dollar.

If on the other hand the horns have been allowed to grow and the owner thinks it best to remove same, it is advisable to place animal in a stansion, carefully securing the head, then apply the dehorning shears far enough down into the head so as to remove enough of the horn to prevent any further growth. To prevent infection apply an antiseptic solution to the affected parts.—Dr. David Roberts.

A two weeks' vacation never seems long when compared to the same time it takes to get money enough to finance it.

A jealous man appears to almost as good advantage as a jealous woman.