THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"The explanation will not be a pleasant task," sighed Lady Bromley, with a sorrowful glance at Mrs. Bryant. "It will evolve the bitter secret of a lifetime, which has been shared alone by my husband and my dearest friend, Helen.

"Of course, to make the situation understood by all our friends," her ladyship began, with a sigh, "I must make the humiliating confession that I was secretly married while I was at a boarding-school near Boston. It was a rash act, and one that I afterward repented in dust and ashes, although I loved my husband most fondly, and our life was a very happy one, the only cloud upon our otherwise serene sky being the fact that we had no children. Sir Charles was on a visit to this country when we became acquainted, a strong and abiding affection springing up between us almost immediately. When he was suddenly recalled to England by his father, he pleaded with all the eloquence of which he was master that I would become his wife before he sailed.

"He asserted that he must make sure of me before leaving me, but as soon as my school-days were over he would come immediately to claim me from my father. I knew I was not doing right, but I yielded to his entreaties, and we were quietly married, Helen alone being admitted to our confidence. Our marriage occurred during the Christmas holidays, which my family believed I was spending at the home of my friend, while in reality Charlie and I passed them very happily in Boston, making our home in one of the Back Bay hotels. He sailed about the first of January, and I returned to school, happy in the prospect of his return, when in a few months I should graduate. Then we were going to my home in Illinois together to confess our secret, make a little visit, after which my husband would take me to England.

"I exerted myself to the utmost to make a good showing in my class, for I believed that Charlie would be present at commencement, and I was ambitious for his sake, as well as for my own. But, alas! a short time previous to the close of the term he wrote me that his father was very ill, and he could not leave, but he charged me to be of good cheer—to go home as usual, and he would follow me the moment he was free to leave his father. But I found that I could not go home without bringing great reproach upon both myself and family, and in this extremity Helen proved herself to be my good angel.

"Her father and mother were upon the eve of going abroad, to be absent a number of months, and at her earnest solicitation they invited me to remain with her during their absence, as otherwise she would have to pass the time with no companion save the housekeeper and one servant, who was the wife of the lodgekeeper and gardener. My father cheerfully accorded me the desired permission, to my intense relief, and then I tried to possess my soul in patience while awaiting the coming of my husband.

"I was very unhappy in some respects, for I realized that I had done very wrong to deceive my friends. If my mother had been living, I think I should have confessed all to her and thrown myself upon her love and mercy, for I was sorely in need of comfort and motherly advice. But I had always stood in awe of my father, who was rather austere and very strict with his children; and thus I was constrained to keep up my deception and preserve my secret until Charlie came, when I trusted to him to smooth everything for me.

"A fortnight or three weeks after the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Atwood, the housekeeper was taken violently ill, and was obliged to go to a hospital in Boston. The summer passed, and September came. Toward the last of the month I received a letter from Charlie saying his father had died, and that he should sail for America within a week. Then there followed a cable despatch, stating he would leave Liverpool the next day on the Catalonia. The vessel was that ill-fated steamer which was wrecked when only two days from port. When I read the report of this tragedy, together with the names of those supposed to be lost—Charlie's among them—the shock nearly killed me, and my baby was born a few hours afterward.

"I should have said that a few weeks after the departure of the housekeeper, Helen and I decided to take the lodgekeeper's wife into our confidence, and it was well that we did so, for the woman's sympathies were immediately enlisted in my behalf, and my own mother could not have been kinder to me. Thus, in the hour of that terrible emergency, she proved a tower of strength and comfort to us both, and promised to guard our secret as sacredly as if it had been her own. But after the coming of my little daughter there arose the appalling question: 'What is to become of us?' Charlie had taken the proofs of our marriage into his possession for safe-keeping, and thus, not knowing the justice who had performed the ceremony, it was out of my power to substantiate any statement which I might make regarding our union. I actually dared not face my father — I feared his bitter anger and repudiation. True, Helen might have helped me out, but she also dreaded the consequences of such a disclosure.

"The lodgekeeper's wife advised us to send the child to some institution in the city, claiming that we could easily keep track of it, and perhaps find a good home for it later on. At first I was wild over such a proposition. I wanted my darling. She was mine, honorably mine. She had my lost Charlie's beautiful blue eyes, fair hair, and complexion, and the mother-love within me revolted against such an unnatural act. But, on the other hand, there was the fear of the censure of and ostracism from all my friends, and the worse fact that my child would be doomed all her life to the suspicion of shameful birth.

"For a week I fought with my own heart and the arguments of Helen and the woman who cared for me, until, weak, despairing, and almost on the verge of insanity, I was utterly incompetent to think or reason lucidly. I was in a very critical condition."

Lady Bromley became greatly agitated at this point in her story, whereupon Mrs. Bryant exclaimed, although she was scarcely less moved:

"Mabel, dear, let me tell the rest. I alone am to blame for what followed, and I will not shrink from my share of reproach." Then addressing their friends, she continued:

"When I realized Mabel's danger I was terribly frightened. I knew that Mary—the lodgekeeper's wife—was afraid she was going to die, and I was appalled at the thought of having the babe discovered in the house in that event, when the truth would all have to come out and the fair fame of my dearest friend be forever tarnished. So I resolved to act upon my own responsibility in accordance with Mary's advice.

"One terribly stormy day I dressed the child nicely, but with the keenest heartache I ever experienced in my life, determined to send her adrift into the world. I do not know what inspired me to the act, but I went to Mabel's jewel-box, took from it a little golden key which I had often seen lying in it, and pinned it upon the baby's dress. Then I wrote a brief note containing these words: 'Will some kind woman take this child, or see that it finds a good home where it will be well reared? Nothing but direst necessity compels her abandonment. She is well and honorably born, and yet a relentless fate makes her an outcast from her own kindred. A peculiar-shaped golden key is fastened to her clothing—it is her only heritage. Will whoever responds to this appeal insert in the early issue of the Boston Transcript, under the head of personals, the following: "X. Y. Z.—The golden key has unlocked a responsive heart," and relieve the writer of this of a heavy burden?'

"I pinned this also to the blanket in which the poor little waif was wrapped. Mary administered an effective potion of soothing syrup, and then, with the child wrapped in a soft gray shawl and in a way to attract as little attention as possible, I started out to consign her to the tender mercies of a certain 'home' in the city. I enveloped myself in Mary's ample waterproof, and wore a thick veil, hoping thus to escape recognition, while I planned to make my trip in the shortest possible time. But when I arrived at the station in town, my unaccustomed burden had become so heavy I was obliged to rest before going farther. So I went directly to the private waiting-room, where I laid the child upon a great table, which stands there to this day.

"I had not been there five minutes when two girls whom I knew entered the room. I recognized them by their voices, and though I was in a corner where I could not see them, or they me, I was in mortal fear lest they should espy me. They passed directly into one of the adjoining rooms, however, and then, to make sure of not being discovered when they came out, I slipped stealthily into the other room, and concealed myself behind a door, to wait for them to leave the place. I was confident that the baby would not wake, and so felt safe to leave it for a few minutes. But I was very tired. I had been broken of my rest for many nights, and was almost worn out with anxiety and excitement, and before I was aware that I was even drowsy I had fallen soundly asleep. I awoke, at length, with a terrible start, and, glancing at the clock, found, to my dismay, that I had slept fully half an hour. Instantly remembering my charge and my errand, I hurried tremblingly into the other room, to find the baby gone!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I was appallel, amazed, frightened!" Mrs. Bryant resumed, after pausing a moment to recover from a nervous trembling that seized her as she recalled the terrible experiences of that hour. "I felt almost like a murderess, with my crime branded upon my brow. I sank into the nearest seat, weak and very nearly unconscious, wondering what I should do, how I ever could face Mabel if she recovered and confess what had happened. Then a comforting thought came to me. It was that no one would have taken the child from the station without first making inquiries and creating an excitement in searching for the mother, unless that one had really wanted it. That no disturbance had been made I was very sure from the placid appearance of the few people about, and the woman in charge of the waiting-room.

"Doubtless, some traveller, on going into the inner room, had observed the suspicious-looking bundle, and, upon examining it, had found the appealing note pinned to the blanket, and so, yearning for just such a child, had taken her to some home where she would be tenderly cared for. At least, I tried to solace my aching heart and guilty conscience by such reasoning as, weary and almost ill, I hastened home, where I awaited with the most harrowing impatience for the next day's Transcript, hoping against hope to find some response to the appeal in my note.

"The paper came, but there was no comfort in it for me. The second day, however, greatly to my joy, I read the welcome words I was looking for, and a great burden rolled off my heart. I was relieved in one way, and yet I was filled with apprehension in another. I had no longer any fear regarding the welfare of the child, but I trembled to confess to Mabel, if she recovered, that it was irretrievably lost—that instead of being placed in an institution, as we had suggested, where we could see it at any moment, or trace it, if given away, we could never hope, because of carelessness and neglect, to know aught of its future.

"The third night afterward we believed that my poor friend would never know the truth, for it seemed likely to be her last, and though my heart was almost broken at the thought of losing her, I tried to feel that everything would be rightly adjusted in the unknown realm whither I believed she was going, and her own grief-stricken heart at rest. It proved to be the crisis, for when the long night of watching was over, she began to rally. A few days more and she was out of danger, when I could endure my burden no longer, and confessed what I had done.

"I shall never forget the look of hopeless despair that swept over her face as she realized the truth; but she never uttered one word of reproach or condemnation. It was as if she recognized that a cruel fate had set its iron heel upon her, and she had nothing to do but submit to it in patient silence. I told her, of course, of the response that had come to me in the Transcript, and this appeared to comfort her a little. She simply said, with a gentle sigh: 'If the poor little waif has found a good home, and can be reared in happy ignorance of her origin, I suppose I ought to be thankful.'

"But who shall describe what we experienced when, about ten days afterward, Sir Charles walked in upon us, well and hearty and full of bright anticipations for the future? He was greatly shocked at the change in his wife, but when he learned the truth about his child he was horror-stricken, and for a few days we were a most wretched household. He declared that the little one should be found—he would rake the country over to recover her. For weeks he inserted advertisements in the Transcript and other papers. He searched throughout Boston and spent money unsparingly, but all to no purpose. No response ever came—no clue to the little one was ever obtained, and finally the sorrowing couple were compelled to abandon all hope.

"As soon as Mabel was strong enough to travel, they left me and went to her home in Illinois. Sir Charles tried to be kind, but I know, in his heart, he never forgave me for the last act that robbed him of his child," Mrs. Bryant concluded, with a regretful sigh.

"Helen, dear, why did you persist in tormenting yourself with that old thought?" said Lady Bromley reproachfully. "I am sure Charlie was very grateful to you for all your devotion and self-sacrifice for me. It is you who have never forgiven yourself, but now I hope you will forget it all and rejoice with me in the recovery of my lost one."

"I do, believe me," said Mrs. Bryant, bending a fond look upon both mother and daughter, and then her fortitude forsook her and she burst into tears of mingled gratitude and regret.

"Well, this is the most thrilling story of its kind that has ever come within my personal experience, and I have helped to ferret out some very curious facts regarding the history of various individuals!" Mr. Lyttleton here interposed, to draw attention from the weeping woman and give her time to recover herself.

"It was a terrible experience. No one will ever know what Charlie and I endured during the few weeks following his return to me," observed Lady Bromley, with emotion. "I do not like to dwell upon it. If my mother had only been alive, we need never have lost our child, for I would have flown to her in my trouble but, as I have said, I feared my father. You know how austere—how relentless he was, Richard. You remember that it was with great reluctance that he forgave me, even when Charlie and I appeared before him and confessed our marriage. Had not my husband been a wealthy baronet, I believe he never would have overlooked my rash act. Before leaving Boston, Helen, Charlie, and I pledged ourselves never to reveal the secret about our little one. It was to remain locked forever away in our own hearts."

"How about the woman Mary and her husband?" questioned her brother.

"Her husband never knew anything of what occurred," her ladyship replied. "He was away at work on a farm belonging to Mr. Atwood during almost the whole of my illness; the coachman was attending to his duties about the residence, and as they did not live upon the place, they never came into the house. Mary we paid handsomely, and swore her to secrecy, and Helen thinks she was true as long as she lived; she died three years afterward. Now you can understand, Richard, why, in spite of our strong affection for each other, Charlie and I were sometimes so depressed during those weeks we spent at home. You used to rally us about it occasionally, you know. Before sailing for England we went on to Boston once more, to make a last attempt to recover the child. But it was a useless journey, and we finally gave up our search and went home. Our loss seemed a peculiarly trying one, in view of the fact that no other children ever came to us. It was the one dark cloud upon the otherwise clear sky of our existence, and though we seldom talked about it, yet each knew that the other grieved in secret over the fact.

(To be continued.)

WHY RICH FOLKS STEAL.

The Views of a Celebrated Paris Physician.

Why do women shoppers who have plenty of money steal things which they do not need?

Others have dismissed the phenomenon after giving it a name—kleptomania — but a celebrated Paris physician and criminologist, has gone straight to 120 of the fair culprits for their own version of the matter.

The interest of these cases is increased by the fact that although a few professional thieves and some persons who are driven to theft by poverty may be among their number, by far the majority of these shop thieves are ladies in easy circumstances. Some of them, indeed, are rich.

Here are some leading facts from the criminologist's investigations. The women only thieve in the large shops. The majority of them are in easy circumstances, and many of them are rich. The articles they take are often of no use to them, or they do not need them, or they have already in their home similar articles, and often more than they require.

Another point is that when arrested at the door of the shop they readily distinguish from the rest of their possessions the stolen article, and many of them admit possession of it with an expression of relief, as if they had felt burdened by its weight.

Many persons, again, go a step further. Anticipating their questioner, they accuse themselves of former thefts committed in similar circumstances, and describe the stolen articles they have in their homes.

As a rule, the goods have not been worn or used, and they frequently still bear the ticket of the shop. Finally the same explanations are given in nearly every case.

"It was too strong for me—I lost my head—I thought that everything belonged to me—if I had not been detected I should have gone on always."

About the Farm

PUMPKINS AS COW FEED.

In all of the Eastern States where pumpkins are extensively grown they are used for cow feed in the late fall and early winter months, and as long as they can be kept without deterioration. Possibly they could be kept all winter under proper conditions of storage, but they are such a bulky food that a very large place is required to store enough of them to last a large herd through the winter months. They are not only hollow inside, but their round shape makes them space-consumers in storage. I regard the pumpkin as equivalent to silage for feed, but when we have the problem of feeding many cows it is much easier to build a silo that will hold several tons of silage than to build a receptacle for several tons of pumpkins, writes Mr J. P. Fletcher. Moreover, the pumpkins must be cold enough to prevent them from decaying, for the air will get into any receptacle in which they can be placed.

With silage the temperature makes little difference if it does not reach the point where it freezes I have found in the feeding of pumpkins that we can feed about forty pounds per day per cow to advantage, and with some cows the milk production will be greatly increased. I have, however, had occasional cows where the effect of feeding pumpkins was to cause the cows to lay on fat and decrease their milk production. There are very few experiments to which we can point relative to the value of feeding pumpkins. In one experiment that I have in mind that was a gain of six per cent. more milk when pumpkins were fed than before they were admitted into the ration. There is no better place to plant pumpkin seed than in the corn field. The corn field, or a proportion of it, is just the place for them. Seeds placed in alternate hills of the same row of corn will give ample room for the growth of the vines, and they will usually bear well. The great advantage about feeding pumpkins is that the men who have no silos can feed them, and nearly all men who keep cows have no silos.

SMALL PRACTICAL SILO.

It is well understood that to give plenty of milk a cow must have succulent food. Grass meets the need from late spring to early fall, and silage in the winter months. But can a farmer or a dairyman having from one to ten cows only afford a silo, and what is the smallest silo that will prove practical? This question has been propounded by a contemporary, and a contributor. Mr. Edward Van Alstyne has tried to answer it. It will probably be too late to build a silo—at least it—by the time this article is read. Nevertheless, this is not the last year in which such things are needed, and Mr. Van Alstyne's suggestions should be remembered. They are:

"This question comes to me again as it has many times before. Its answer, like many others of like nature, depends largely on the man. For some with one cow it would be a practical thing to sink a molasses hogshead in the ground and fill it with cut corn. Its practicability would depend upon the amount of roughage available, and the lack of other succulent foods, as well as the means at hand for growing the corn, and putting it into the silo. Now these same principals obtain in every case up to ten cows. After that in any case where corn will grow, and the silage milk can be sold. I believe it is not a question, 'Can I afford a silo?' but 'Can I afford not to have one?' The average feeding season is about five months, or 150 days. The ordinary cow will eat about forty pounds of silage daily, or three tons in this period; ten cows mean thirty tons. A round silo twenty feet deep (I do not believe it wise to have one of less depth), and twelve feet across would hold thirty-eight tons, allowing for settling, would mean just about thirty tons actual. One the same height and fourteen feet in diameter would hold fifty tons, about forty actual after settling, This would cost but a trifle more to build, and would hold enough more for a longer season, more cows or summer feeding, either of these certainly a practical thing."

BRISTLES.

The hog lots should be dry. Burn over the feeding places at least once a year.

Hogs should have plenty of clean water to drink, and their feeding troughs should be kept clean.

Dry meal can be fed in shallow troughs; hogs chew it well.

When the little pigs are weaned put the sow out of their hearing for a while.

Take care not to allow food to sour in the pig troughs. Feed just what the pigs will eat up clean; if any remains clean it out.

Charcoal, sulphur and salt should be kept in every pen and hog lot, as they are correctives and are relished by the hogs.

Breed for utility every time. Too many of our so-called professional breeders have become cranky upon certain fancy points and loose sight of everything else in their efforts to stamp uniformity of markings in their herds.

Every farmer should have a few well bred hogs as they are waste savers.

Feed the young pigs whole oats on a platform in an enclosure by themselves.

Lice take the life right out of hogs. They can not grow; they cannot take a minute's comfort with them. Spray, if you can't dip. Even an old broom dipped in spraying solution is better than nothing.

THE WELL-BRED CAMEL.

Manners of These Animals are Generally Perfect.

"Whenever I recall the sacred city of Kairowan, my ear is aware of the dull, soft sound of the camel's leisurely tread," declares Mr. Graham Petrie, in his boon on "Tunis, Kairowan and Carthage." The camel is ubiquitous in this city; one meets him at every turn, pursuing every occupation, humble and exalted.

He draws the carts, he treads the wheat, he grinds the corn, and he carries such enormous burdens of hay and fodder that one wonders if indeed, his poor humped back would not be broken by adding the proverbial straw.

Although his occupations are menial, although his figure is grotesque and ungainly, although his eyes are often covered with blinkers and his mouth enclosed by a nose-bag, although his neck is denuded of its long, handsome collar and his body clipped and shaved till his skin is as bare as a plucked ostrich, although he is lodged in filthy stables and beaten with sticks by heartless boys, he never loses his dignity of bearing.

The manners of the camel are generally perfect, as is noticeable when one sees a score or more drinking at one of the many wells outside the town.

Arranging themselves in regular and orderly rows on either side of the trough, they stretch out their long necks and suck up the water with a solemnity and orderliness that would do credit to the formal etiquette of a Chinese mandarin. There is no rude hustling for place, no indecorous haste, no selfish and ill-bred disregard of neighbors' needs and the rights of others.

When a camel has assuaged his thirst, he quietly withdraws, and with a graceful motion of the neck which suggests a courteous bow of thanks, another takes his place.

Every one knows that a camel is able to carry a store of water which will last him for many days when crossing a desert. One day, as I was watching some camels lying in the sun, I learned how the store was utilized. I saw a small irridescent bubble appear from the mouth of one of them, which rapidly expanded till it was the size of a football. For a moment it hung there, looking quite beautiful, if a little uncanny, as it reflected all the colors of the rainbow in the brilliant glare of the African noon. Then there came a liquid, gurgling sound as the water passed down the throat into the stomach. It is really quite a pretty spectacle.

A STRENUOUS HOLIDAY.

Winston Churchill to be the Kaiser's Guest.

Mr. Winston Churchill, President of the British Board of Trade, has been invited by the German Emperor to be present at the German military manoeuvres at Wurtemburg this month. General Sir Bruce Hamilton will also be present, as well as the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary, and General Chefket Pasha, the famous Young Turk leader.

The Kaiser expects his guests to devote twenty hours a day to the manoeuvres. They will be awakened at 3 in the morning, and taking the train for the field at 4 o'clock, an hour later, will be in their saddles for the day's operations.

Each day is taken up with hard, long rides on horseback or in motor-cars. The Kaiser himself goes ungrudgingly through the fatigues of the mimic campaign, and delights to set his guests an example of endurance by weathering a pelting rain-storm in the saddle.

German officers of high position will be attached to Mr. Churchill and General Hamilton to inform them minutely regarding the purpose and the progress of the manouvres.

When the field operations are over the Imperial guests are regaled each night with exhaustive debates on the day's results and the morrow's plans. With some good luck they may retire by 11 o'clock, but in no circumstances are they allowed more than four hours' sleep.

Veteran foreign officers who have had experience both of actual warfare and of the "Kaiser manoeuvres" say that the latter are incomparably more exhausting.