

The Great Tontine

by HAWLEY SMART

Author of "Broken Bonds," "Bound to Win," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

Hemminging was right in the prediction about the nurse. She kept her face as much as possible turned away from him, and addressed herself to Ringwood in low, measured tones, which struck the manager as having been deliberately adopted. He was disappointed, for he had reckoned upon her voice to recall this woman to his memory. As yet it had told him nothing, and he felt pretty sure that she would allow him to hear as little of it as might be. Clearly, if possible, he must force her to talk.

"No," observed the manager, "the old critter don't recollect me a bit, and yet, poor old chap, he and I have been friendly for the last twenty years; but I suppose, ma'am, there are many of his old friends he don't recognize?"

"He recognizes very few of them now, sir," rejoined the nurse, in the same low, measured tones.

"He knows Mr. Pogram, of course," said Hemminging carelessly.

"Who said anything about Mr. Pogram?" piped the octogenarian, from the depth of his cushions. "He never comes near me now, why should he? What does he want with a worn-out old fellow like me? But I'd like to see him, I'd like to see him."

A gleam of surprise flashed for a moment across the manager's face, but, transient as it was, the woman, who from under her downcast lids was steadily watching him, saw it, and fidgeted nervously with her apron in consequence.

"It strikes me," continued Hemminging, "that my old friend there is not quite so deaf as you make him out to be, Mrs. — Mrs. —"

"Clark, sir," she replied. "Excuse me; I told you just now that, though he really is very deaf, he exaggerates his deafness a good deal when out of humor. The name of Pogram would, of course, attract his attention."

"Pogram?" quavered the invalid again; "I want to see him about that right of foreshore in front of Rydland Terrace. If he don't buy it, somebody else will, and build on it, likely as not. It will send his rents down in the Terrace if he lets any one build between him and the sea."

There was a twinkle in Hemminging's eye, which did not escape Mrs. Clark, as he replied:

"Why, your head is as clear for business, Mr. Krabbe, as ever it was; if you would only take to an ear-trumpet, I believe, when you have got through the winter, you might resume your old place in the office. Don't you think, ma'am, he will come round with the spring a bit?"

The nurse shook her head, but made no further reply.

"Well, Ringwood," said the manager, rising, "you were sent down here to see Mr. Krabbe, and so put an end to a foolish rumor; I suppose you are satisfied now, and quite ready to vouch that he is alive, and in tolerably good case, for his age."

He was accompanied by Ringwood, about to leave the room when, to the intense astonishment of the latter, he turned swiftly round, crossed to the deaf man's chair, put his hand lightly on his shoulder, and whispered into his ear. Ringwood saw the invalid start as if the manager had hit him; but before he could observe more, Hemminging hurried him into the lane, and led the way rapidly back to Rydland.

"Well," said Ringwood, as they turned into the high road, "what do you make of it all? and what, in heaven's name, possessed you to whisper into a deaf man's ear?"

"I can't explain matters more briefly," rejoined Hemminging, laughing, "than by telling you what I said. It was merely this: 'A little overdone, Bob; but you can have twenty pound a week at the 'Vivacity' whenever you like to join the profession.'"

"Why, you don't mean to say —" exclaimed Ringwood.

"Yes, I do," interrupted the manager. "Bob Pogram plays old Krabbe, and well he does it. As for the nurse, I still can't put a name to her; but would back her also to be theatrical."

CHAPTER XXIII.

As the footsteps of the visitors died away Bob Pogram sprang from his chair, and, throwing his rug and wrappers upon the ground, exhibited the comic picture of a young man partially made up to represent an old one.

"It's all up, Kitty," he exclaimed. "I told the governor it was madness to continue the deception; but he was obstinate and refused to admit that he was beaten. Of course, neither he nor I ever reckoned upon Hemminging turning up in this way; I wish I had taken your advice. You said the minute you saw your old manager that it was best to say old Mr. Krabbe was too ill to receive visitors, that if we once played our little comedy before him he was certain to detect one, if not both of us; but I had bamboozled so many, that I was ass enough to think I could deceive him. What do you think he whispered into my ear before leaving, Kitty?"

"I don't know," she replied; "but it does not much matter. I saw that he had recognized you some little before that; whether he made me out also I cannot

say; but that, I suppose, is not of much consequence now."

"Do you know what all this means, girl? Do you know that this means penal servitude for me? Why Hemminging should turn against us in this fashion I cannot imagine; he could not have come here with that barrister fellow by accident. At all events, it is too risky for me, and I mean to be out of Rydland to-night."

Bob Pogram, as, having resumed his own clothes, he walked quickly back to Rydland, rapidly turned over in his mind all the details of his projected flight. There was but one difficulty that he saw in the way of his stealthy retreat, and that was his father. To draw a good big sum from the bank, and slip quietly away from Rydland, was easy enough; but the bidding good-bye to his father was a different matter. Influenced entirely by his own selfish fears, he determined to spare the old lawyer that ceremony.

He kept carefully out of his father's way, but employed a part of his time at "The Crown" in writing a short note to him, in which, after explaining his own flight and his reasons for it, he strongly recommended the old man to follow his example. He further reminded him that he had already obtained two dividends from the "Tontine," by the fraudulent representation that old Krabbe was alive, and, consequently, placed himself at the mercy of Lord Lakington, or anybody else who chose to denounce him.

Hard as old Pogram was, he a little broke down under his son's note. It has been said that every human being must have something to love, that it is a necessity of our existence, and such love as lawyer Pogram was capable of giving he had vented on his son.

However, the old lawyer quickly recovered himself, and after the first half-hour, faced the situation as undauntedly as ever.

In the course of the afternoon there was a rumor afloat in the town that old Krabbe was dead, and inquirers at Mr. Pogram's office were told it was true that the old man had died very suddenly and unexpectedly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was quite open to question whether Lord Lakington was not as much dismayed at the explosion of the great Pogram fraud as the old lawyer himself. He was grateful to his nephew, no doubt, for preventing his falling a prey to a most audacious imposture; still the fact remained, that he, Viscount Lakington, was left in just as precarious a position regarding income as ever.

Although the Viscount might argue to himself that it was his nephew's bounden duty to marry money, wherewith to prop up the coronet that would eventually fall to him, yet he had an inward conviction that Jack Phillimore would please himself about choosing a bride; and though he might talk of speaking to his daughter concerning the palpable love-affair going on between herself and her cousin, yet he knew that he had tried Beatrice's obedience to its uttermost limit when she consented to marry Robert Pogram. His lordship was now thinking for himself; and now occurred to him that idea which had flashed across Ronald Ringwood on the discovery of Finnigan.

"Why," he exclaimed, "I can marry Miss Chichester and settle the 'Great Tontine' that way. I will do it, and with as little delay as possible. I had better, perhaps, take Beatrice into my confidence at once; it would be as well to have her on my side, and she can, if she chooses, aid me materially. Girls object at times to youthful stepmothers, but she and Miss Chichester appear to get on well together. Besides, if she means realizing her present love-dream, who the second Lady Lakington is can be of little consequence to her."

About two or three days afterwards the Viscount, rather to his amazement, was informed by his daughter that Miss Chichester was grateful to him, and all of them, for their kindness; she thoroughly appreciated and thanked Lord Lakington for the honor he had done her, and she was willing to meet his views about the "Tontine" in any way, but that arrangement could never be; and the Viscount consequently had to once more ponder in his study over that, to him, stupendous problem of "What is to become of me?"

It speedily occurred to him that the next thing to try was to effect a compromise. Miss Chichester had stated her readiness to meet his views in any way but matrimony, and he would therefore write to Carbuckle, and propose a division of the big lottery, stipulating further, as part of the arrangement, that there should be no prosecution of the Pograms, as Miss Phillimore's name would be almost sure to be mixed up in such a trial.

When the servant one day announced Mr. Ringwood, there was no little flutter in the drawing-room in the Victoria Road. Mary felt that from that interview she should be able to decide as to whether Ringwood really cared for her or not.

"I have come, Miss Chichester, I regret to say, to break bad news to you," said Ringwood; "and if Mrs. Lyme Wregis will excuse us, I should prefer that you alone heard my evil tidings in the first place. Terence Finnigan is dead."

"Poor Terence!" replied the girl, "I am sorry for him; though when existence has become so merely mechanical as his was, one cannot but feel that death is deprived of all its terrors."

"By his death your share in the 'Tontine' becomes void, and I am sorry to inform you—and it is this more especially that Mr. Carbuckle wished me to point out to you—that the agreement between you and Lord Lakington being still unsigned, it is not worth the paper it is written on."

"I understand," replied Mary, quietly. "You mean to say that Lord Lakington takes the whole 'Tontine,' and that my prospect of being an heiress has melted into this air."

"That, I regret to say, is the exact state

of the case; and very, very hard luck for you it is."

"Well, Mr. Ringwood, I am not going to pretend to you that I am wholly indifferent to the loss of four thousand a year; but after all, remember, I only stand in the same position that I did three or four weeks ago, and never having had the spending of such an income, I very partially realize the loss of it. I shall always feel that I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for all the time and trouble you have wasted, first on my aunt's behalf, and then on my own."

"I have something more to say to you—of little moment, it may be, to you, but a very great matter to me. I have loved you sincerely, and hoped to make you my wife, almost from the beginning of our acquaintance. If I have never ventured to tell you so before, the 'Tontine' must be my excuse. I was always in possession of the facts of the case, while you were not; and I dreaded not so much what the world might say as what you might think, when, supposing I had the good fortune to win you, you should discover that I had known of the possibility of your being an heiress all along. I could not face that, and I swore to keep aloof from you until this lottery was decided one way or the other. I could have even dared to put my fate to the test had you won the whole and become a great heiress. There would, at all events, have been nothing underhand about my wooing then. Whatever answer you may give me now, you must, at all events, acquit me of mercenary motives, and feel sure that I love you for yourself. I love you very dearly, Mary; do you think you could love me well enough to be my wife?"

"You have taken me so by surprise that I hardly know," faltered the girl; "but, believe me, no one can more thoroughly appreciate the delicacy of your conduct than I do, and it is that which makes me now hesitate. Your wife, Mr. Ringwood, ought to be a woman who not only loves you dearly, but can enter fully into the career which I am sure is before you; and unless I feel certain I could be all this to you, I would say you 'may,' whatever my own feelings might be. Will you give me a little time to think over it? Come and see me tomorrow, and I will honestly answer your question."

"It is more than I dared to hope for," replied Ringwood, as he raised her hand to his lips; "please make my adieu upstairs, and till tomorrow, good-bye."

That the finishing of the "Great Tontine" resulted in a double wedding it is almost superfluous to add; but that Lord Lakington, under the strenuous pressure of his nephew and daughter, was induced to settle ten thousand pounds upon Mary Chichester as a wedding gift is a fact that deserves to be recorded; the Viscount, after the somewhat manner of those who have been spendthrifts in their youth, developing a laudable ambition for the accumulation of riches in his mature age.

(THE END.)

PIPES THAT GROW ON VINES.

Meerschaum Said to Have a Rival in a South African Gourd.

Since the department of agriculture, through its bureau of foreign plant investigations, brought to the notice of the smokers of this country the fact that pipes could be grown that would wear well and smoke sweet and cool, great interest has been manifested in the enterprise.

This wonderful plant, known as the calabash gourd, says the Dallas, Tex., Farm and Ranch, is a native of South Africa, and produces, in the form of fruit, calabashes which are being made into the highest quality of pipe bowls. Annually many thousands of pipe gourds are exported, both in the rough and in the finished pipe.

The plants grow very fast, one plant producing from 100 to 200 bowls. It is about five months from the time the seed is planted until the fruit can be gathered.

Constant attention must be given to the plants when under cultivation, so as to insure a crop of suitable shapes for pipes. Many farmers of South Africa make a special study of growing the correct shapes.

The gourds require a hot, dry soil, with rain at the proper season to bring them to perfection. The curved stem of the calabash forms a light and appropriate shape. This is the gourd of commerce.

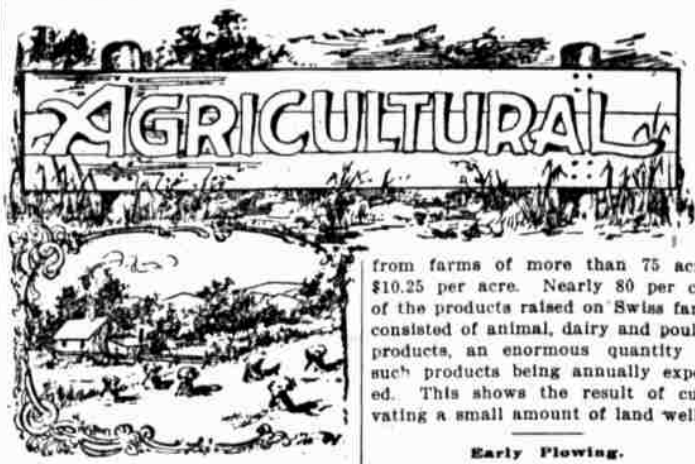
Curiously enough these gourds bear a resemblance to the capacious bowled meerschaum so popular in Germany. The calabash pipe not only yields a very sweet and cool smoke, but it colors beautifully. Its life is about as long as that of a briar pipe. It makes a very high polish. These pipes are usually lined with commercial meerschaum, although the cheaper grades are lined with tin. In South Africa they sell for \$1 to \$30, according to the finish and style.

The present market price of these pipes is rather high, owing to the fact that no two of them are of the same size and shape, necessitating the making of the mountings by hand. The industry in South Africa is such that there are shipped annually from 150,000 to 200,000 pipes.

The ease with which these gourds can be grown is such that it is thought American smokers will not be slow to appreciate this latest and best thing in pipes, which seems destined to oust the meerschaum.

A Safe Sign.

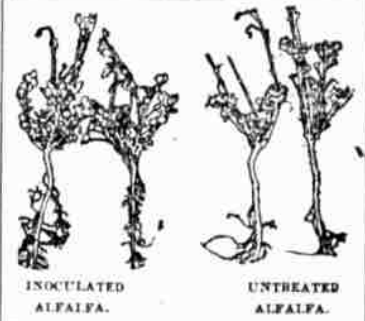
"Was it a bad play?"
"It must have been bad. None of the debutantes would let their maumas go."—Birmingham Age-Herald.



Inoculation of Clover.

Clovers do not always grow as readily or as vigorously as might be expected from the richness of the soil. In recent years it has been discovered by scientists that the growth of plants of this class (clovers, peas and beans) is dependent to some extent on the presence of small nodules or bunches on the roots. These nodules contain bacteria which in some mysterious way assist the roots in taking up food from the soil. If these bacteria are not present in the soil the clover will be likely to make poor growth—indeed, alfalfa may not make any growth. If the proper kind of bacteria are supplied and the inoculation of soil and root is successful the plants will show extra vitality.

Cultures containing these bacteria have been sent out to farmers from the Ontario Agricultural College for the past four years, with directions



for applying to the fields that are being seeded with clover. Last season 300 farmers reported that their alfalfa crops had been benefited by the application while 140 reported that there was no gain. With alsike clover the reports were equally favorable over 80 per cent of the experiments finding that the culture had improved the crop. With red clover the results were not so favorable, only 55 per cent having noted a gain. Peas and beans showed still less benefit from the application. As the work is still in its infancy it is probable that better results will be obtained as the methods of application are better understood.

The illustration shows the comparative growths of inoculated and uninoculated alfalfa plants. In a bulletin just issued it is stated that the cultures will again be distributed for 1909 at a price of 25 cents for each bottle containing enough for 60 pounds of seed.—Montreal Star.

Soil Temperature and Seed Germination.

Scientists have discovered that the lowest soil temperature at which the process of growth begins in most cultivated crops is 45 to 48 degrees Fahrenheit, but the maximum results are attained only after the soil has reached a temperature of 68 to 70 degrees. The germination of wheat, rye, oats and flax go forward most rapidly at 77 to 87.8, and corn and pumpkins germinate best at 92 to 101. Corn will grow at a temperature of 51, requiring eleven days to come through, while it will germinate in three days at 65.3 degrees. Oats require seven days to germinate at 41, whereas they will germinate in two days at 65 degrees.

These facts emphasize the importance of so cultivating the soil as to develop heat at the earliest possible period. Our deep soils where irrigation has played hop can not warm up because they must first evaporate the water. Sandy soils warm more quickly than adobe for reasons which everybody understands. The depth of planting also has a great deal to do with the germination, and we are hoping that this spring will not linger long in the lap of winter as was the case with the last two or three seasons.—Denver Field and Farm.

Swiss Farm Profits.

There has been recently made an interesting report of investigations carried on co-operatively between the Department of Agriculture and farmers in Switzerland as to the gross and net returns derived from farms operated under different systems of management in 1906, the returns being compared with those secured during the preceding five years. The average profits as ascertained from 230 holdings were: On farms up to 12½ acres in size, \$21 per acre; from 12½ to 25 acres, \$21.50; from 25 to 37½ acres, \$17; from 37½ to 75 acres, \$12, and

from farms of more than 75 acres, \$10.25 per acre. Nearly 80 per cent of the products raised on Swiss farms consisted of animal, dairy and poultry products, an enormous quantity of such products being annually exported. This shows the result of cultivating a small amount of land well.

Early Plowing.

The value of early plowing as a means of destroying weeds, especially rag weed, wild oats, artichokes, etc., is not appreciated fully by farmers. Similar weeds grow in a most discouraging manner, especially on low, moist land, during the summer, and in many instances take possession of the fields. They will appear on the scene next year, in multiplied numbers, if an effort is not made to destroy them this summer, which can best be done by early plowing.

The plow should be started in these weedy patches just as soon as the fields are cleared. Rag weeds are rank growing soil robbers which should not be permitted to ripen seed on any farm, but are now seen in corn fields, pastures and small grains in many sections. They are a special pest on some farms where careless methods of handling the soil have been employed. If such fields are plowed as early as possible the plants will be prevented from going to seed. Kingheads are now in possession of some very productive fields, and we believe this is due to spring plowing or no plowing, as such fields are often disked instead of plowed.

New Method of Keeping Potatoes.

A German publication, the Practical Adviser in Fruit Raising and Gardening, states that a new method for keeping potatoes and preventing sprouting consists in placing them on a layer of coke. Dr. Schiller, of Brunswick, who has published the method, is of the opinion that the improved ventilation by means of coke is not alone responsible for the result, but believes that it is due to the oxidation of the coke, which, however, is a very slow one. Coke always contains sulphur, and it is very possible that the minute quantities of oxides of carbon and sulphur, which result from the oxidation, mixing with the air and penetrating among the potatoes are sufficient to greatly retard sprouting. Potatoes so treated are said to keep in good condition until the following July.

Balancing Ration.

When one has corn, corn fodder, ensilage and clover hay, it is considered the best practice for one to procure a food rich in protein, such as bran, cotton-seed meal or linseed meal, with which to balance the ration. If one mixes bran, corn and cotton-seed meal in the proportion of 5 parts bran, 3 parts cornmeal, 2 parts cotton-seed meal, and feeds 10 pounds of the mixture each day, with 30 pounds of ensilage and 10 pounds of clover hay, he will get very good results. Molasses is ordinarily fed by sprinkling over the hay or ensilage.—Country Gentleman.

General Age of Trees.

Inquiry as to the general age of trees being put to an authority at Washington, it was found that the pine trees attained 700 years as a maximum length of life; 425 years was the allotted span of the silver fir; the larch lived 275 years, the red beech 245, the aspen 210, the birch 200, the ash 170, the elder 145, the elm 130. The heart of the oak begins to rot at about the age of 300 years. Of the holly, it is said that there is a specimen 410 years old near Anshaffenburg, Germany.

Worms in Colts.

For intestinal worms in colts the following mixture is used by some veterinarians: Mix together as a base 1 pound each of salt and granulated sugar; in this mix ¼ pound of tobacco dust of fine cut tobacco, 4 ounces of sulphate of iron powder, 6 ounces of powdered worm seed. Give a heaping teaspoonful in the feed at first once a day, then twice a day, and keep up for three weeks.

Guinea Fowls.

The flesh of guinea is generally dark colored, tender, juicy and in flavor equal to the ring-neck English pheasant. Many think it more palatable, for the flavor is not so pronounced, and there is considerably more of it. The flesh of the white guinea is light in color, and if they are crossed with the pearl variety the meat of the latter will become nearly as light.

Queen Bees.

It is said that bees usually supersede their queens before they are too old for service; and when an apriary is once stocked with a good grade of queens the bees can, as a rule, be depended upon to supersede their queens at the proper time.