

# The Firm of Girdlestone

BY  
A. CONAN DOYLE

## CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

"Cut down! You don't mean to say you are paid in proportion to the rottenness of the ships?"

"There ain't no use makin' a secret of it among friends," said Miggs. "That's just how the land lies with us. A voyage or two back I spoke to Mr. Girdlestone, and I says to him, says I, 'Give the ship an overhauling,' says I. 'Well and good,' says he, 'but it will mean so much off your wage,' says he, 'and the mate's wage as well.' I put it to him straight and strong, but he stuck at that. So Sandy and me, we put our heads together, and we 'greed it was better to take fifteen pounds and the risk, then come down to twelve pounds and safety."

"It is scandalous!" cried Tom Dimsdale hotly. "I could not have believed it."

"It's done every day, and will be while there is insurance money to be gained," said Miggs. "It's an easy thing to turn a few thousands a year while there are old ships to be bought, and offices which will insure them above their value. There was D'Arcy Campbell, of the Silvertown—what a trade that man did! He was smart! Collisions was his line, and he worked 'em well. There warn't a skipper out of Liverpool as could get run down as nat'ral as he could."

"Get run down?"

"Aye. He'd go lolloping about in the Channel if there was any fog on, steering for the lights o' any steamers or headin' round for all the fog whistles if it was too thick to see. Sooner or later, as sure as fate, he'd get cut down to the water's edge. It was a fine game! Half a yard o' print about his noble conduct in the newspapers, and maybe a leader about the British tar and unexpected emergencies. It once went the length of a subscription. Ha! ha!" Miggs laughed until he choked.

"And what became of this British star?" asked the German.

"He's still about. He's in the passenger trade now."

"There's many a way that it's done, sir," the mate added. "There's loadin' a cranky vessel wif' grain in bulk without usin' partition boards. If you get a little water in, as you are bound to do with a ship o' that kind, the grain will swell and swell until it bursts the seams open, and down ye go. Then there's ignition o' coal gas aboard o' steamers. That's a safe game, for nobody can deny it. And there are accidents to propellers. If the shaft o' a propeller breaks in heavy weather it's a bad lookout. I've known ships leave the docks with their propellers half sawn through all round. There's to end o' the tricks o' the trade."

"I cannot believe, however," said Tom stoutly, "that Mr. Girdlestone connives at such things."

"He's on the waitin' lay," the seaman answered. "He doesn't send 'em down, but he just hangs on, and keeps his insurance up. He's had some good hauls that way, though not o' late. There was the Belinda at Cape Palmas. That was five thousand clear, if it was a penny. And the Socotao—that was a bad business! She was never heard of, nor her crew. Went down at sea, and left no trace."

"The crew, too!" Tom cried, with horror. "But how about yourselves, if what you say is true?"

"We are paid for the risk," said both the seamen, shrugging their shoulders.

"But there are government inspectors?"

"Ha! ha! I daresay you've seen the way some of them do their work," said Miggs.

Tom's mind was filled with consternation at what he had heard. If the African merchant were capable of this, what might he not be capable of? Was his word to be depended on under any circumstances? And what sort of firm must this be, which turned so fair a side to the world and in which he had embarked his fortune. All these thoughts flashed through his mind as he listened to the gossip of the garrulous old sea dogs. A greater shock still, however, was in store for him.

Von Baumer had been listening to the conversation with an amused look upon his good-humored face. "Ah!" said he, suddenly striking in. "I will tell you something of your own firm which perhaps you do not know. Have you heard that Mr. Ezra Girdlestone is about to be married?"

"To be married!"

"Oh, yes; I have heard it this morning at Eckermann's office. I think it is the talk of the city."

"Who's the gal?" Miggs asked, with languid interest.

"I disremember her name," Von Baumer answered. "It is a girl the major has met—the young lady who has lived in the same house, and is what they call a warder."

"Not—not his ward?" cried Tom, springing to his feet and turning as white as a sheet. "Not Miss Harston? You don't tell me that he is going to marry Miss Harston?"

"That is the name. Miss Harston it is, sure enough."

"It is a lie—an infamous lie!" Tom cried, hotly.

"So it may be," Von Baumer answered serenely. "I do but say what I have heard, and heard more than once on good authority."

"If it is true there is villainy in it," cried Tom, with wild eyes, "the blackest villainy that ever was done upon earth. I'll go—I'll see him to-night. I shall know the truth!" He rushed furiously downstairs and through the bar. There was a cab near the door. "Drive into London!" he cried; "69 Eccleston square. I am on fire to be there!" The cabman sprang on the box, and they rattled away as fast as the horse would go. Long before reaching No. 69 he had opened the door and was standing upon the step. The instant that the cab pulled up he sprang off, and rang loudly at the great brass bell which flanked the heavy door. "Is Mr. Girdlestone in?" he asked, as a maid appeared at the door.

"No, sir."

"Miss Harston, is she at home?" he said excitedly.

"No, sir. They have both gone away."

"Gone away!"

"Yes. Gone into the country, sir. And Mr. Ezra, too, sir."

"And when are they coming back?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"They are not coming back."

"Impossible!" Tom cried in despair.

"What is their address then?"

"They have left no address. I am sorry I can't help you. Good-night, sir."

Tom Dimsdale stood upon the doorstep looking blankly into the night. He felt dazed and bewildered. What fresh villainy was this? Was it a confirmation of the German's report, or was it a contradiction of it? Cold beads stood upon his forehead as he thought of the possibility of such a thing. "I must find her," he cried, with clenched hands, and turned away heartsick into the turmoil and bustle of the London streets.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Rebecca, the fresh-complexioned waiting maid, was still standing behind the ponderous hall door, listening, with a smile upon her face, to young Dimsdale's retreating footsteps, when another and a brisker tread caught her ear coming from the opposite direction. The smile died away as she heard it, and her features assumed a peculiar expression, in which it would be hard to say whether fear or pleasure predominated. She passed her hands up over her face and smoothed her hair with a quick, nervous gesture, glancing down at the same time at her snowy apron and the bright ribbons which set it off. Whatever her intentions may have been, she had no time to improve upon her toilet before a girl turned in the door and Ezra Girdlestone stepped into the hall. As he saw her shadow figure, for the gas was low, he uttered a hoarse cry of surprise and fear, and staggered backwards against the door post.

"Don't be afeared, Mister Ezra," she said in a whisper; "it's only me."

"What makes you stand about like that? You gave me quite a turn."

"I didn't mean for to do it. I've only just been answering of the door. Why, surely you've come in before now and found me in the hall without making much account of it."

"Ah, lass," answered Ezra, "my nerves have had a shake of late. I've felt queer all day. Look how my hand shakes."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said the girl with a titter, turning up the gas. "I never thought to see you afeared of anything. Why, you looks as white as a sheet!"

"There, that's enough!" he answered roughly. "Well, are they gone?"

"Yes, they are gone," she answered, standing by the side of the couch on which he had thrown himself. "Your father came about three with a cab, and took her away."

"She didn't make a fuss?"

"Make a fuss? No, why should she? Her fuss enough made about her, in all conscience. Oh, Ezra, before she got between us you was kind to me at times. I could stand harsh words from you six days a week, if there was a chance of a kind one on the seventh. But now—now what notice do you take of me?" She began to whimper and to wipe her eyes with a little discolored pocket handkerchief.

"Drop it, woman, drop it!" cried her companion testily. "I want information, not sniveling. She seemed reconciled to go?"

"Yes, she went quiet enough," the girl said with a furtive sob.

"Did you hear my father say anything as to where they were going?"

"I heard him tell the cabman to drive to Waterloo station."

"Nothing more?"

"No."

"Well, if he won't tell you, I will. They have gone down to Hampshire, my lass. Bedsworth is the name of the place, and it is a pleasant little corner near the sea. I want you to go down there as well to-morrow."

"Want me to go?"

"Yes, they need some one who is smart and handy to keep house for them. There is some old woman already, I believe, but she is old and useless. I warrant you wouldn't take long getting things shipshape. My father intends to stay down there some little time with Miss Harston."

"And how about you?" the girl asked, with a quick flash of suspicion in her dark eyes.

"Don't trouble about me. I shall stay behind and mind the business. Some one must be on the spot. I think Cook and Jane and William ought to be able to look after me among them."

"And I won't see you at all?" the girl cried, with a quiver in her voice.

"Oh, yes, you shall. I'll be down from Saturday to Monday every week, and perhaps oftener. If business goes well I may come down and stay for some time."

Whether I do or not may depend upon you."

Rebecca Taylforth started and uttered an exclamation of surprise. "How can it depend upon me?" she asked eagerly.

"Well," said Ezra, in a hesitating way, "it may depend upon whether you are a good girl, and do what you are told or not. I am sure that you would do anything at all to serve me, would you not?"

"You know very well that I would, Mister Ezra. When you want anything done you remember it, but if you have no use for me then there is never a kind look on your face or a kind word from your lips. I could stand your harshness. I could stand the blow you gave me, and forgive you for it, from my heart, but oh! it cut me to the very soul to be standing by and waiting while you were making up to another woman. It was more than I can bear."

"Never mind, my girl," said Ezra in a soothing voice. "That's all over and done with. See what I've brought you." He rummaged in his pocket and produced a little parcel of tissue paper, which he handed to her.

It was only a small silver anchor, with Scotch pebbles inlaid in it. The woman's eyes, however, flashed as she looked at it, and she raised it to her lips and kissed it passionately.

"What am I to do down at Bedsworth?" she asked.

"I want you to be Miss Harston's companion. She'll be lonely, and will need some other woman in the house to look after her."

"You are still thinking of her, then! She must have this; she must have that! Everything else is as dirt before her. I'll not serve her—so there! You can knock me down if you like."

"Rebecca," said Ezra slowly, "do you hate Kate Harston?"

"From the bottom of my soul," she answered.

"Well, if you hate her, I tell you that I hate her a thousand times more. You thought that I was fond of her. All that is over now, and you may set your mind at ease."

"Why do you want her so well cared for then?" asked the girl suspiciously.

"I want some one who feels towards her as I do to be by her side. If she were never to come back from Bedsworth it would be nothing to me."

"What makes you look at me so strangely?" she said, shrinking away from his intense gaze.

"Never mind. You go. You will understand many things in time which seem strange to you now. At present if you will do what I ask you will oblige me greatly. Will you go?"

"Yes, I will go."

"There's a good lass. Give us a kiss, my girl. You have the right spirit in you. I'll let you know when the train goes to-morrow, and I will write to my father to expect you. Now, off with you, or you'll have them gossiping downstairs. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Mister Ezra," said the girl, with her hand upon the handle of the library door. "You've made my heart glad this night. I live in hope—ever in hope."

"I wonder what she hopes about," the young merchant said to himself as she closed the door behind her. "Hopes I'll marry her, I suppose. She must be of a very sanguine disposition. A girl like that might be invaluable down at Bedsworth. If we had no other need for her, she would be an excellent spy." He lay for some little time on the couch with bent brow and pursed lips, musing over the possibilities of the future.

While this dialogue had been going on in the library of Eccleston square, Tom Dimsdale was still wending his way homewards with a feeling of weight in his mind and a presentiment of misfortune which overshadowed his whole soul. In vain he assured himself that this disappearance of Kate's was but temporary, and that the rumor of an engagement between her and Ezra was too ridiculous to be believed for a moment. Argue it as he would, the same dead, horrible feeling of impending trouble weighed upon him. Impossible as it was to imagine that Kate was false to him, it was strange that on the very day that this rumor reached his ears she should disappear from London. How bitterly he regretted now that he had allowed himself to be persuaded by John Girdlestone into ceasing to communicate with her. He began to realize that he had been duped, and that all these specious promises as to a future consent to their union had been so many baits to amuse him while the valuable present was slipping away. What could he do now to repair the past? His only course was to wait for the morrow, and see whether the senior partner would appear at the offices. If he did so, the young man was determined to have an understanding with him. So downcast was Tom that, on arriving at Phillimore Gardens he would have slipped off to his room at once had he not met his burly father upon the stairs. "Bed!" roared the old man upon hearing his son's proposition. "Nothing of the sort, sir. Come down into the parlor. Your mother has been waiting for you all the evening."

(To be continued.)

## Best He Could Do.

"Sir," said the irate parent as he unexpectedly entered the parlor, "what do you mean by kissing my daughter?"

"Excuse me," replied the poor but otherwise honest young man, "but I desired to show my appreciation of your daughter's loveliness, and kisses are the only things I can afford to give her at the present stage of the game."

## Pa's Experience.

Little Willie—Say, pa, what is a scheme?

Pa—A scheme, my son, is something that usually falls through shortly after you invest money in it.

## BABCOCK MILK TEST.

Simple, Accurate and Easily Mastered With Little Study.

By J. H. Franston, Professor of Dairying, University of Idaho, Moscow.

A great deal has been written about testing milk and a large number of farmers already use the Babcock test; but enough inquiries have come to the writer to warrant the assertion that the subject is not yet fully understood. Many seem to have the idea that the Babcock test is a complicated, and at best an unreliable affair. This is an erroneous idea and should not be allowed to prevail. The test is simple, accurate and easily mastered by anyone who will give the matter a little careful study and attention. It must be borne in mind that the accuracy and value of the test depend not alone on the test, but quite as much on the proper taking of the sample. If that is improperly done the results are of little value. For example, the writer has known of cow-owners who, when desiring to test the milk of an individual cow, have taken the sample by milking directly into the sample bottle. When it is known that the first part of a cow's milk is largely water and the last part of stripplings is very rich in fat, it is self-evident that such a sample would yield results of little value so far as determining the actual richness of that particular cow's milk. The milk to be tested should be poured from one can into another several times or carefully stirred with a stirrer until it is of a uniform mixture. The sample is then immediately taken, preferably with a small, long handled dipper. If the testing cannot be done soon after the sample is taken it must be placed in an airtight jar and some preservative added to keep it sweet.

The Babcock test bottles are graduated on the supposition that an 18 gram sample is taken. Milk varies very little in its specific gravity and a pipette graduated to hold 17.6 cubic centimeters will deliver approximately 18 grams of milk. When the sample is ready for testing, the jar containing it should be placed in warm water and slowly heated to a temperature of about 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Mix the sample well; especially see that any cream which may have gathered on the side of the jar is carefully mixed with the other part of the sample. The measuring pipette is now filled to the mark. This is done by sucking the milk up into the pipette above the mark; the dry forefinger is immediately placed over the top of the pipette to prevent the milk from escaping. By gently releasing the pressure the milk is allowed to flow out until level with the mark on the stem of the pipette. The pipette now contains the 18 grams.

The sample is now emptied into the test bottle. To do this the test bottle should be held in a slanting position, the pressure on the pipette released, allowing the milk to slowly run into the bottle in such a way as to allow the air to gradually escape from the bottle.

The next step is adding the acid. This is measured in the acid graduate; the exact amount to use will depend largely on the strength of the acid, the temperature of the sample to be tested, etc. If ordinary commercial sulphuric acid is used, 17.6 cubic centimeters will be found approximately correct. With a little individual experimenting the tester will soon notice the proper amount to use. To prevent the burning or charring of any part of the milk the acid is poured slowly down the side of the bottle until all has been added. Now give the bottle a gentle rotary motion, thus giving the acid a chance to act equally on all parts of the milk. Then let it stand three or four minutes, after which it is given another rotary movement and then placed in the tester.

The bottles are placed in the tester in such a position as to keep the machine balanced. The bottles should now be whirled for five or six minutes at such speed as is generally marked on the machine. The machine is now allowed to slow down for the purpose of adding water to the bottles. Enough water is added to bring the contents up to the neck of the bottle, after which the machine is again started and run for two minutes; again stopped and sufficient warm water added to bring all the fat contents up into the graduated part of the bottle. After another whirling of one minute the samples are to be read. It may be well to state that it is preferable to use soft water and that the temperature should be about 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

To read the amount of fat, take one bottle out at a time, hold it upright, the graduated part should be on a level with the eyes. The difference between the highest and lowest limits of the butter fat column is the amount of butter fat expressed in per cent direct. Most milk bottles are graduated up to 10 per cent, each large division indicates one per cent and each small division two-tenths of one per cent of butter fat. To illustrate the method of reading let it be supposed that the top of the fat column is at 8.5, and the bottom at 4.5, then the readings 8.5-4.5 equals 4 per cent fat. This means that in 100 pounds of this kind of milk there would be exactly 4 pounds of fat.

If the testing has been properly done the butter fat column should be perfectly clear, of a brownish yellow color; the line separating it from the acid should be clear and distinct. Too strong acid is apt to cause black or

charred particles to appear in the fat. This same result may also be due to too high temperature of either the milk or the acid. Insufficient amount of acid or too weak acid or too low temperature of the milk may result in a white or cloudy test.

Much more complete directions accompany each outfit—the principal object of this article is to impress upon farmers the simplicity of the test and that there is nothing mysterious or mystifying about it. It is so simple that any one of ordinary intelligence, willing to give it a little time and patience, can easily master all its details. When the farmer fully realizes that it furnishes him a key not only for weeding out his unprofitable cows, but also for checking up his creamery man, he will not be slow to make use of the Babcock test.

## FAMILY HOTBEDS.

Some Good Suggestions for the Small Beginner.

By J. R. Shinn, University of Idaho, Moscow.

Some kind of a hotbed is an essential factor if one is to secure crops from plants that require an exceptionally long season for maturing. A hotbed also affords an opportunity to grow certain crops, such as radishes and lettuce, in advance of the season. Such crops as tomatoes, cabbages, celery and cauliflower, practically demand that they be started in the hotbed before they are transplanted to the field, especially in the North. As these crops must ever be regarded as the staple product of every well-balanced garden, the construction and management of hotbeds is a very timely topic for the prospective gardener to consider.

First of all, a hotbed may be defined as an inclosure covered with sash and furnished with artificial heat so that the plants are kept in an actively growing condition. Common stable manure constitutes the main source for securing this heat. There are several requirements that should be noted regarding the kind and quality of manure used for hotbeds. It should be practically the same age throughout, and it should be of such texture that when packed it will neither be fluffy nor will it be soggy. On the other hand, it should respond with springy elasticity beneath the weight of a man, without fluffing up when the pressure is removed. Horse manure which has from one-third to one-half straw composing its total bulk will usually be found to provide this requisite texture. Moreover, this manure should be fresh, in order that fermentation may proceed rapidly.

The process of fermentation is started before the manure is placed in the hotbed. To accomplish this the manure is usually piled in long, shallow, square-topped piles; if dry when piled, it is moistened throughout, and if it is apt to become water-soaked, as is the case in rainy climates, it should be piled under shelter, for where so much moisture is present manure will remain cold. The first fermentation is almost sure to be irregular, so it is necessary to fork over the pile, distributing the hot manure throughout the mass, in order to get the heat uniformly distributed. When it is noticed that steam is coming from the pile again uniformly, it may be taken as evidence that the manure is ready to place in the hotbed.

After one thoroughly understands the important details of preparing the manure for the purpose of heating, attention should be called to the location and construction of the pit and frame. Pits are usually dug from 24 to 30 inches deep and of sufficient size to admit the frames being placed inside their walls. Such pits should be located near some much-frequented path, in order that they are sure to receive the requisite amount of attention. Always have the hotbed facing the south and if such a site is available, put it on the south side of some building or tight board fence or hill. Protection should also be sought from the prevailing winds, for winds have a decided effect in carrying away the heat. A well-drained location is also an essential requirement.

Hotbed sash are 3x6 feet in size and cost about \$3 each. Frames for these sash are made with the back 12 inches higher than the front, the latter being 10 inches. The number of sash and the size of the frame will depend upon the needs of the family. Usually one frame 3x6 feet will afford sufficient hotbed area for a family of six.

Before the frame is placed upon the pit the fermenting manure is placed in the pit and thoroughly compacted, bringing the level of the manure to within three inches of the surface of the soil. From three to six inches of good loamy garden soil are distributed evenly over the surface of the manure in order to furnish a seed bed. The seed is not planted until the excessive heat of the first few days has begun to subside. By the use of a thermometer the temperature may be accurately ascertained. Tomatoes may be sown at a temperature of 90 to 80 degrees, cabbage and lettuce from 80 to 70 degrees.

Railway whistles inflict torture on so many people that the efforts abroad to check the plague have won approval from the people. Austria has introduced a system of dumb signaling to start and stop the trains. Belgium is trying compressed air whistles instead of steam, and Germany experiments with horns.