

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
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CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

It was Saturday—the third Saturday since Girdlestone and his ward had disappeared. Dimsdale had fully made up his mind that, go where he would, Ezra should not escape him this time. On two consecutive Saturdays the young merchant had managed to get away from him, and had been absent each time until the Monday morning. Tom knew, and the thought was a bitter one, that these days were spent in some unknown retreat in the company of Kate and of her guardian. This time at least he should not get away without revealing his destination.

The two young men remained in the office until two o'clock. Then Ezra put on his hat and overcoat, buttoning it up close, for the weather was bitterly cold. Tom at once picked up his wide-awake and followed him out into Fenchurch street, so close to his heels that the swinging door had not shut on the one before the other passed through. Ezra glanced round at him when he heard the footsteps. There was no longer any pretense of civility between the two, and whenever their eyes met it was only to exchange glances of hatred and defiance.

A hansom was passing down the street, and Ezra, with a few muttered words to the driver, sprang in. Fortunately another had just discharged its fare, and was still waiting by the curb. Tom ran up to it. "Keep that red cab in sight," he said. "Whatever you do, don't let it get away from you." The driver, who was a man of few words, nodded, and whipped up his horse.

It chanced that this same horse was either a faster or a fresher one than that which bore the young merchant. The red cab rattled down Fleet street, then doubled on its tracks, and coming back by St. Paul's plunged into a labyrinth of side streets from which it eventually emerged upon the Thames embankment. In spite of all its efforts, however, it was unable to shake off its pursuer. The red cab journeyed on down the Embankment, and across one of the bridges, Tom's able charioteer still keeping only a few yards behind it. Among the narrow streets on the Surrey side Ezra's vehicle pulled up at a public house. Tom waited patiently outside until he should reappear.

In a very few minutes young Girdlestone came out again, accompanied by a tall, burly man, with a bushy red beard, who was miserably dressed. He was helped into the cab by Ezra, and the pair drove off together. Tom was more bewildered than ever. Who was this fellow, and what connection had he with the matter on hand? Like a sleuth hound the pursuing hansom threaded its way through the torrent of vehicles which pour down the London streets, never for one moment losing sight of its quarry. Presently they wheeled into the Waterloo road, close to the Waterloo station. The red cab turned sharp round and rattled up the incline which leads to the main line. Tom sprang out, tossed a sovereign to the driver, and followed on foot at the top of his speed.

As he ran into the station Ezra Girdlestone and the red-bearded stranger were immediately in front of him. There was a great swarm of people all around, for as it was Saturday there were special trains to the country. Tom was afraid of losing sight of the two men in the crowd, so he elbowed his way through as quickly as he could, and got immediately behind them—so close that he could have touched them with his hand. They were approaching the booking office when Ezra glanced round and saw his rival standing behind him. He whispered something to his half-drunken companion. The latter turned, and with an inarticulate cry, like a wild beast, rushed at the young man, and seized him by the throat with his brawny hands.

It is one thing, however, to catch a man by the throat, and another to retain that grip, especially when your antagonist happens to be an International football player. To Tom this red-bearded rough, who charged him so furiously, was nothing more than the thousands of bull-headed forwards who had come upon him like thunderbolts in the days of old. With the ease begotten by practice he circled his assailant with his long muscular arms, and gave a quick convulsive jerk in which every sinew of his body participated. The red-bearded man's stumpy legs described a half-circle in the air, and he came down on the stone pavement with a sounding crash which shook every particle of breath from his enormous body.

Tom's fighting blood was all aflame now, and his grey eyes glittered with joy as he made at Ezra. All the cautions of his father and the exhortations of his mother were cast to the winds as he saw his enemy standing before him. To do him justice Ezra was nothing loth, but sprang forward to meet him, hitting with both hands. They were well matched, for both were trained boxers and exceptionally powerful men. Ezra was perhaps the stronger, but Tom was in better condition. There was a short, eager rally—blow and guard and counter so quick and hard that the eye could hardly follow

it. Then a rush of railway servants and bystanders tore them asunder. Tom had a red flush on his forehead where a blow had fallen. Ezra was spitting out the fragments of a broken tooth, and bleeding profusely. Each struggled furiously to get at the other, with the result that they were dragged further apart. Eventually a burly policeman seized Tom by the collar, and held him as in a vice.

"Where is he?" Tom cried, craning his neck to catch a glimpse of his enemy. "He'll get away after all." "Can't 'elp that," said the guardian of the peace phlegmatically. "A gentleman like you ought to be ashamed. Keep quiet now! Would yer then!" This last at some specially energetic effort on the part of the prisoner to recover his freedom.

"They'll get away! I know they will!" Tom cried in despair, for both Ezra and his companion, who was none other than Burt, of African notoriety, had disappeared from his sight.

His fears proved to be only too well founded, for when at last he succeeded in wresting himself from the constable's clutches he could find no trace of his enemies. A dozen bystanders gave a dozen different accounts of their movements. He rushed from one platform to another over all the great station. He could have torn his hair at the thought of the way in which he had allowed them to slip through his fingers. It was fully an hour before he finally abandoned the search, and acknowledged to himself that he had been hoodwinked for the third time, and that a long week would elapse before he could have another chance of solving the mystery.

He turned at last sadly and reluctantly away from the station and walked across to Waterloo bridge. It was some consolation, however, that he had had one fair crack at Ezra Girdlestone. He glanced down at his knuckles, which were raw and bleeding, with a mixture of satisfaction and disgust. With a half smile he put his injured hand in his pocket, and looking up once more became aware that a red-faced gentleman was approaching him in a highly excited manner.

It could not be said that the red-faced gentleman walked, neither could it be said that the red-faced gentleman ran. His made of progression might best be described as a succession of short and unwieldy jumps, which, as he was a rather stout gentleman, appeared to indicate some very urgent and pressing need for hurry. His face was bathed in perspiration, and his collar had become flaccid and shapeless from the same cause. It appeared to Tom, as he gazed at those rubicund, though anxious, features, that they should be well known to him. That glossy hat, those speckless gaiters, and the long frock coat, surely they could belong to none other than the gallant Major Tobias Clutterbuck, late of Her Majesty's 119th of the Line.

As the old soldier approached Tom he quickened his pace, so that when he eventually came up with him he could only puff and pant and hold out a soiled letter.

"Read!" he managed to ejaculate. Tom opened the letter and glanced his eye over the contents, with a face which had turned as pale as the major's was red. When he finished it he turned without a word and began to run in the direction from which he had come, the major following as quickly as his breath would permit.

CHAPTER XVII.

Kate had come out with some vague idea of making a last struggle for her life and freedom. With the courage of despair, she came straight down to the avenue to the sole spot where escape seemed possible.

"Good-mornin', missy," cried Stevens, as she approached. "You don't look extra bright this mornin', but you ain't as bad as your good guardian made me think. You don't seem to feel no difficulty in gettin' about."

"There is nothing the matter with me," the girl answered earnestly. "I assure you there is not. My mind is as sound as yours."

"That's what they all says," said the ex-warder with a chuckle.

"But it is so. I cannot stay in that house longer. I cannot, Mr. Stevens, I cannot! My guardian will murder me. He means to. I read it in his eyes. He as good as tried this morning. To die without one word to those I love—without any explanation of what has passed—that would give a sting to death."

"Well, if this ain't outrage!" cried the one-eyed man, "perfectly outrage! Going to murder you, says you! What's he a-goin' to do that for?"

"He hates me for some reason. I have never gone against his wishes, save in one respect, and in that I can never obey him, for it is a matter in which he has no right to command."

"Quite so!" said Stevens, winking his one eye. "I knows the feeling myself."

"Why won't you let me pass?" pleaded Kate. "You may have had daughters of your own. What would you do if they were treated as I have been? If I had money you should have it, but I have none. Do, do let me go! Perhaps when you are on your last bed of sickness the memory of this one good deed may outweigh all the evil that you have done. See, here is my watch and my chain. You shall have that if you will let me through."

"Let's see it?" He opened it and examined it critically. "Eighteen carat—it's only a Geneva though. What can you expect for a Geneva?"

"And you shall have fifty pounds when I get back to my friends. Do let me pass, good Mr. Stevens, for my guardian may return at any moment."

"See here, missy," Stevens said solemnly, "dooty is dooty, and I wouldn't let you through that gate. As to this 'ere watch, if so be as you would like to write a line to your friends, I'll post it for you at Bedsworth in exchange for it, though it be only a Geneva."

"You good, kind man," cried Kate, all excitement and delight. "I have a pencil

in my pocket. What shall I do for paper?" She looked eagerly round and spied a small piece which lay among the brush-wood. With a cry of joy she picked it out. It was very coarse and very dirty, but she managed to scrawl a few lines upon it, describing her situation and asking for aid. "I will write the address upon the back," she said. "When you get to Bedsworth you must buy an envelope and ask the postoffice people to copy the address on it."

"I bargained to post it for the Geneva," he said. "I didn't bargain to buy envelopes and copy addresses. That's a nice pencil case of yours. Now I'll make a clean job of it if you'll throw that in."

Kate handed it over without a murmur. At last a small ray of light seemed to be finding its way through the darkness which had so long surrounded her. Stevens put the watch and pencil case in his pocket, and took the little scrap of paper on which so much depended. As Kate handed it to him she saw over his shoulder that coming up the lane was a small pony carriage, in which sat a buxom lady and a very small page. The sleek little brown pony which drew it ambled along at a methodical pace which showed that it was entirely master of the situation, while the whole turnout had an indescribable air of comfort and good nature. Poor Kate had been so separated from her kind that the sight of people who, if not friendly, were at least not hostile to her, sent a thrill of pleasure into her heart. There was something wholesome and prosaic, too, about this homely equipage, which was inexpressibly soothing to a mind so worn by successive terrors.

"Here's some one a-comin'," cried Stevens. "Clear out from here—it's the governor's orders."

"Oh, do let me stay and say one word to the lady!"

Stevens seized his great stick savagely. "Clear out!" he cried in a hoarse, angry voice, and made a step towards her as if he would strike her. She shrunk away from him, and then a sudden thought seized her, she turned and ran through the woods as fast as her feeble strength would allow. The instant that she was out of sight, Stevens very deliberately and carefully tore up the little slip of paper with which she had entrusted him, and scattered the pieces to the wind.

Kate Harston fled as quickly as she could through the wood, stumbling over the brambles and crashing through the briars, regardless of pain or scratches or anything else which could stand between her and the possibility of safety. She soon gained the shed and managed to mount on the top of it by the aid of the barrel. Craning her neck, she could see the long dusty lane, with the bare, withered hedges upon either side, and the dreary line of the railway embankment beyond. There was no pony carriage in sight.

She hardly expected that there would be, for she had taken a short cut, and the carriage would have to go some distance round. The road along which it was traveling ran at right angles to the one which she was now overlooking, and the chances were equal as to whether the lady would turn round or go straight on. In the latter case, it would not be possible for her to attract her attention. Her heart seemed to stand still with anxiety as she peered over the high wall at the spot where the two roads crossed.

Presently she heard the rattle of wheels, and the brown pony trotted round the corner. The carriage drew up at the end of the lane, and the driver seemed to be uncertain how to proceed. Then she took the reins, and the pony lumbered on along the road. Kate gave a cry of despair, and the last ray of hope died away from her heart.

It chanced, however, that the page in the carriage was just at that happy age when the senses are keen and on the alert. He heard the cry, and glancing round he saw through a break in the hedge that a lady was looking over the wall which skirted the lane they had passed. He mentioned the fact to his mistress. "Maybe we'd better go back, ma'am," he said.

"Maybe we'd better not, John," said the buxom lady. "People can look over their garden walls without our interfering with them, can't they?"

"Yes, mam, but she was a-hollerin' at us."

"No, John, was she though? Maybe this is a private road and we have no right to be on it."

"She gave a holler as if some one was a-hurtin' of her," said John with decision.

"Then we'll go back," said the lady, and turned the pony round.

Hence it came about that just as Kate was descending with a sad heart from her post of observation, she was electrified to see the brown pony reappear, and come trotting round the curve of the lane with a rapidity which was altogether foreign to that quadruped's usual habits. Indeed, the girl turned so very white at the sight, and her face assumed such an expression of relief and delight, that the lady who was approaching saw at once that it was no common matter which had caused her to summon them.

"What is it, my dear?" she cried, pulling up when she came abreast of the place. Her good, kind heart was touched already by the pleading expression upon the girl's sweet face.

"Oh, madam," said Kate, in a low, rapid voice. "I am shut up in these grounds, and shall be murdered unless help comes."

"Be murdered!" cried the lady in the pony carriage, dropping back in her seat and raising her hands in astonishment.

"It is only too true," Kate said, trying to speak concisely and clearly so as to enforce conviction, but feeling a choking sensation about her throat, as though an hysterical attack were impending. "My guardian has shut me up here for some weeks, and I firmly believe that he will never let me out alive. Oh, don't pray don't think me mad! I am as sane as you are." (To be continued.)



Grafting Methods.

Apple trees are usually propagated in the nursery either by budding or root grafting two-year-old seedlings. Larger seedlings may be taken up and the roots cut into a great number of sections five or six inches long. Upon these the scions of the desired varieties should be grafted by means of the whip and tongue method of grafting, as shown in the accompanying illustrations. This grafting does not require any wax, the parts being simply held together by binding with twine or raffia. Root grafting of this kind is usually done during the winter time, and the grafts stored in moist sand or soil until the ground is fit for planting them outside in the spring. They should then be planted in nursery rows, and in two or three years should make trees large enough to transplant to permanent positions.

Top grafting is usually done by the cleft method, as shown in the illustrations. In this method the scions are cut wedge-shaped and fitted firmly into the cleft made in the stock, which is usually cut off squarely where the branches are from one to two inches in diameter, two scions being placed in each stock. In this, as in all methods of grafting, great care must be taken to get the cambium layer, or inner bark, of the stock and scion in contact in at least one side, for it is at this point that union takes place, and any



SAMPLES OF TOP GRAFTING.

failure to connect the cambium layers of stock and scion is sure to result in failure of the scions. In top grafting, the wounded surfaces should be covered with grafting wax. A good formula for this is: Four parts of resin, two of beeswax and one of tallow, by weight, melted together. Top grafting should be done early in the spring, before growth commences.

In all this propagation work great care should be taken to select scions from trees bearing the very best type of the varieties intended for propagation. Nurserymen, as a rule, are not careful enough in this respect and take scions from any trees so long as it is of the desired variety.—H. L. H.

About Cow Testing.

Prof. Fraser of the Illinois Experiment Station says that a complete knowledge and mastery of the dairy business cannot be secured without testing each cow. Many farmers and dairymen think this testing of the cows is too much trouble, and do not want to "fuss" around with it, but if they considered the profits to be realized from a herd of really good cows as compared with one of poor cows, or even a mixed herd, they would soon see that it really pays to "fuss" around with the scales and Babcock test. Where one cow will give good returns for her feed and care there may be another in the stall next to her that is not paying her board, but is eating up the profits from the paying cow. But how is the owner to know this if he does not test them? A pair of scales and a tester do not cost much, but they pay big profits on the investment.

Seed Inspection Is Needed.

The need of rigid inspection of agricultural seeds such as clover and alfalfa has been again brought sharply to the attention of the authorities of the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College. Dr. O. M. Ball of the department of botany has repeatedly warned farmers and planters against the dangers of introducing highly pernicious weeds into alfalfa and other fields through impure agricultural seeds. It has been pointed out that Russian thistle, dodder, Johnson grass and several

varieties of burr clover and medick have been found growing in alfalfa fields in various parts of the State, and they have been introduced solely through impure alfalfa seed. Another extremely noxious weed has made its appearance in alfalfa fields in widely separated parts of the State. This is charlock or wild mustard.

Cultivation of Potatoes.

Cultivation should commence just as soon as the young plants begin to appear above the ground. The field may be gone over with a light harrow, or, better still, with a weeder. This is a cheap method of cultivation, since a wide space is covered. It is also effective in breaking any crust that may have formed, in destroying small weeds and leveling ridges left in planting.

As soon as the rows can be seen the cultivator should be used. If the ground has become packed the first cultivation may be deep and close to the plants. Subsequent cultivation should be frequent. The conservation of moisture by frequent tillage cannot be too strongly enforced. The old notion that tillage must cease as soon as the blossom appears is wrong. It should be continued as late in the season as the vines will permit. As the tops begin to spread out and cover the space between the rows they partially shade the soil and thus lessen the loss of moisture by evaporation.

The cultivator should be set as narrow as the space between and keep it covered with a loose mulch. Experience and experiments favor nearly level cultivation. Excessive hilling intensifies the injurious effects of dry weather. The best cultivator is one having a number of small teeth, so that it will leave the soil fine and comparatively level.

Pitch Fork Attachments.

In gathering up freshly cut grass or hay, etc., with a pitchfork a small quantity adheres to the prongs of the fork each time a pile is lifted. In a short while the fork becomes clogged and useless. It being necessary to remove each particle by hand. In order that this cleaning may be done almost automatically, a Wisconsin man has designed the attachment for pitchforks shown here. A transverse clearer bar is arranged below the tines of the fork, guides on each end of the bar partly encircling the end prongs, permitting the bar to slide freely on the prongs. Pivoted on the handle of the fork is a bar which connects with other bars extending to the cleaning bar and to a sleeve which slides on the handle. By moving the sleeve on the handle the cleaning bar slides over the prongs of the fork, removing anything adhering to them.

CLEANS OFF HAY.

Poultry Tips.

Eggs need to be turned in the incubator. Don't neglect it.

Don't expect prize stock from cheap eggs.

Make the nests handy not only to clean out but to gather the eggs from.

The wet grass is no place for the young chicks to run unless they are expected to die of cramps.

A bushel of grain a year for each laying hen is said to be the proper amount to count on in estimating the cost of keeping poultry.

Fowls like green food as well as any other class of stock. They need it in their business, so it is good policy to keep them supplied.

In the Sheep Fold.

There is that sheep with hair in place of wool. Get her out of the flock. Wool is what we are after, not hair.

As soon as the ewes have all been served get the ram out. He will only be a nuisance from that time on.

It is a good plan to have a little yard with a trough made on purpose for the lambs just outside the lot where the sheep are kept.

It isn't much trouble to count the sheep every day. Better do it and be sure that all of them are all right.

The hog has the credit of being the farm mortgage raiser. But sheep will do it just as surely if they are given a chance.

Recognize Orchard Pests.

If you have an orchard or vineyard you cannot learn too soon to recognize the San Jose scale, codling worm, curculio, mildew and black rot. Do not procrastinate this knowledge until the orchard and vineyard are injured, or it will be too late.