

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

Another moment and the door was stealthily opened. Once again the broad golden bar shot out across the lawn almost to the spot where the confederates were crouching. In the center of the zone of light there stood a figure—the figure of the girl. Even at that distance they could distinguish the pearl-grey mantle which she usually wore and the close fitting bonnet. She had wrapped a shawl round the lower part of her face to protect her from the boisterous wind. For a minute or more she stood peering into the darkness of the night, as though uncertain whether to proceed or to go back. Then, with a quick, sudden gesture she closed the door behind her. The light was no longer there, but they knew that she was outside the house, and that the appointment would be kept.

What an age it seemed before they heard her footsteps. She came very slowly, putting one foot gingerly before the other, as if afraid of falling over something in the darkness. Once or twice she stopped altogether, looking round, no doubt, to make sure of her whereabouts. At the instant the moon shone out from behind a cloud, and they saw her dark figure a short distance off. The light enabled her to see the withered oak, for she came rapidly towards it. As she approached she satisfied herself apparently that she was the first on the ground, for she slackened her pace once more and walked in the listless way that people assume when they are waiting. The clouds were overtaking the moon again, and the light was getting dimmer.

"I can see her still," said Ezra in a whisper, grasping his father's wrist in his excitement.

The old man said nothing, but he peered through the darkness with eager, straining eyes.

"There she is, standing out a little from the oak," the young merchant said, pointing with a quivering finger. "She's not near enough for him to reach her."

"He's coming out from the shadow now," the other said huskily. "Don't you see him crawling along the ground?"

"I see him," returned the other in the same subdued, awestruck voice. "Now he has stopped; now he goes on again! He is close behind her! She is looking the other way."

A thin ray of light shot down between the clouds. In its silvery radiance two figures stood out hard and black, that of the unconscious girl and of the man who crouched like a beast of prey behind her. He made a step forward, which brought him within a yard of her. She may have heard the heavy footfall above the shriek of the storm, for she turned suddenly and faced him. At the same instant she was struck down with a crashing blow. There was no time for a prayer, no time for a scream. One moment had seen her a magnificent woman in all the pride of her youthful beauty, the next left her a poor battered senseless wreck. The navy had earned his blood money.

At the sound of the blow and the sight of the fall both the old man and the young ran out from their place of concealment. Burt was standing over the body, his bluejean in his hand.

"Not even a groan," he said. "What d'ye think of that?"

Girdlestone wrung his hand and congratulated him warmly. "Shall I light the lantern?" he asked.

"Don't!" Ezra said earnestly.

"I had no idea that you were so faint-hearted, my son," the merchant remarked. "However, I know the way to the gate well enough to go there blindfold. What a comfort it is to know that there is no blood about! That's the advantage of a stick over a knife."

"You're correct there, gov'nor," Burt said, approvingly.

"Will you kindly carry one end and I'll take the other. I'll go first, if you don't mind, because I know the way best. The train will pass in less than half an hour, so we have not long to wait. Within that time every chance of detection will have gone."

Girdlestone raised up the head of the murdered girl, and Burt took her feet. Ezra walked behind as though he were in some dreadful dream. He had fully recognized the necessity for the murder, but he had never before realized how ghastly the details would be. Already he had begun to repent that he had ever acquiesced in it. Then came thoughts of the splendid possibilities of the African business, which could only be saved from destruction by this woman's death. How could he, with his luxurious tastes, bear the squalor and poverty which would be his lot were the firm to fail. Better a rope and a long drop than such a life as that! All these considerations thronged into his mind as he plodded along the slippery footpath which led through the forest to the wooden gate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

When Tom and the major arrived at Waterloo station, the latter in a breathless condition, they found the German waiting for them with his two fellow ex-

iles. The gentleman of Nihilistic proclivities was somewhat tall and thin, with a long frock coat buttoned almost up to his throat, which showed signs of giving at the seams every here and there. His grizzly hair fell over his collar behind, and he had a short bristling beard. He stood with one hand stuck into the front of his coat and the other upon his hip, as though rehearsing the position in which his statue would be some day erected in the streets of his native Russia, when the people had their own, and despotism was no more. In spite of his worn attire there was something noble and striking about the man. His bow, when Baumser introduced him to the major and Tom, would have graced any court in Europe. Round his neck he had a coarse string from which hung a pair of double eyeglasses. These he fixed upon his aquiline nose, and took a good look at the gentlemen whom he had come to serve.

Bulow, of Kiel, was a small, dark-eyed clean shaven fellow, quick and energetic in his movements, having more the appearance of a Celt than of a Teuton. He seemed to be full of amiability, and assured the major in execrable English how very happy he was to be able to do a service to one who had shown kindness to their esteemed colleague and persecuted patriot, Von Baumser. Indeed both of the men showed great deference to the German, and the major began to perceive that his friend was a very exalted individual in socialistic circles. He liked the look of the two foreigners, and congratulated himself upon having their co-operation in the matter on hand.

Ill luck was in store for the expedition, however. On inquiry at the ticket office they found that there was no train for upwards of two hours, and then it was a slow one, which would not land them until eight o'clock at Bedworth. At this piece of information Tom Dimsdale fairly broke down, and stamped about the station, raving and beseeching the officials to run a special, but the cost what it might. This, however, could by no means be done, owing to the press of Saturday traffic. There was nothing for it but to wait. The three foreigners went off in search of something to eat, and having found a convenient cook shop they disappeared therein and feasted royally at Von Baumser's expense. Major Tobias Clutterbuck remained with the young man, who resolutely refused to leave the platform. The major knew of a snug little corner not far off where he could have put in the time very comfortably, but he could not bring himself to desert his companion even for a minute.

Indeed, it was well that day that young Dimsdale had good friends at his back. His appearance was so strange and wild that the passers-by turned back to have another look at him. His eyes were open and staring, giving a fear-inspiring character to his expression. He could not sit still for an instant, but paced up and down and backwards and forwards under the influence of the fierce energy which consumed him, while the major plodded along manfully at his side, suggesting every consideration which might cheer him up, and narrating many tales, true and apocryphal, most of which fell upon heedless ears.

Ezra Girdlestone had four hours' start of them. That was the thought which rankled in Tom's heart and outweighed every other consideration. He knew Kate's nature so well that he was convinced that she would never have expressed such fears to Mrs. Scully unless she had very assured reasons for them. In fact, apart from her own words, what could this secrecy and seclusion mean except foul play? After what he had learned about the insurance of the ships and the manner in which the elder Girdlestone had induced him to cease corresponding with Kate, he could believe anything of his employers. He knew, also, that in case of Kate's death the money reverted to her guardian. There was not a single link missing in the chain of evidence which showed that a crime was in contemplation. Then, who was that butcher-like man whom Ezra was taking down with him?

The major has put it on record that those two hours appeared to him the longest that ever he passed in his life, and Tom, no doubt, would indorse the sentiment. Everything must have an end, however, and the station clock, the hands of which seemed several times to have stopped altogether, began at last to approach the hour at which the Portsmouth train was timed to depart. Baumser and his two friends had come back, all three smoking cigarettes, and looking the better for their visit to the cookshop. The five got into a first-class railway carriage and waited. Would they never have done examining tickets and stamping luggage and going through all sorts of tedious formalities? At last comes the shrill whistle of the guard, the answering snort from the engine, and they are fairly started upon their mission of rescue.

There was much to be arranged as to their plan of action. Tom, Von Baumser and the major talked it over in a low voice, while the two socialists chatted together in German and consumed eternal cigarettes. Tom was for marching straight up to the Priory, and demanding that Girdlestone should deliver his ward up to them. To the major and the German this seemed an unwise proceeding. It was to put themselves hopelessly wrong from a legal point of view. Girdlestone had only to say, as he assuredly would, that the old story was a ridiculous mare's nest, and then what proof could they adduce, or what excuse give for their interference? However plausible their suspicions might be, they were, after all, only suspicions, which other people might not view in as grave a light as they did.

"What would you advise, then?" Tom asked, passing his hand over his heated forehead.

"I'll tell you now," the old soldier answered, "and I think my friend Von Baumser will agree with me. I understand that this place is surrounded by a wall to which there is only one gate. Sure

we shall wait outside this wall, and one of us can go in as a skirmisher and find out how the land lies. Let him ascertain from the young lady herself if she requires immediate help, and what she would wish done. If he can't make his way to her, let him hang about the house, and see and hear all that he can. We shall then have something solid to work on. I have a whistle here on me watch chain. Our skirmisher could take that with him, and if he wants immediate help one blow of it would be enough to bring the four of us over to him. Though how the devil I am to get over a wall," concluded the major ruefully, looking down at his own proportions, "is more than I can tell."

"I hope, my friends," said Von Baumser, "that you will allow me the honor of going first."

"That is my place," said Tom with decision. It was nearly eight o'clock by the time they reached their destination. The station master directed them to the Flying Bull, where they secured the very vehicle in which Kate and her guardian had been originally driven up. By the time that the horse was put in it was close on to the half hour.

"Drive as hard as you can go to the Priory, me man," said the major.

The sulky ostler made no remark, but a look of surprise passed over his phlegmatic countenance. For years back so little had been heard of the old monastery that its very existence had been almost forgotten in Bedworth. Now, whole troops of Londoners were coming down in succession, demanding to be driven there. He pondered over the strange facts as he drove through the darkness, but the only conclusion to which his bucolic mind could come was that it was high time to raise the fare to that particular point.

It was a miserable night, stormy and wet and bitterly cold. None of the five men had a thought to spare for the weather, however. The two foreigners had been so infected by the suppressed excitement of their companions, or had so identified themselves with their comrades' cause, that they were as eager as the others.

"Are we near?" the major asked.

"The gate is just at the end o' the lane, sir."

"Don't pull up at the gate, but take us a little past it."

"There ain't no way in except the gate," the driver remarked.

"Do what you're ordered," said the major sternly.

Once again the ostler's face betrayed unbounded astonishment. He slewed half way round in his seat and took as good a look as was possible in the uncertain light at the faces of his passengers. It had occurred to him that it was more than likely that he would have to swear to them at some future date in a police court. "I'd know that thick 'un w' the red face," he muttered to himself, "and him w' the yellow beard and the stick."

They passed the stone pillars with the weather-beaten heraldic devices, and drove along by the high park wall. When they had gone a hundred yards or so the major ordered the driver to pull up, and they all got down. The increased fare was paid without remonstrance, and the ostler rattled away homewards, with the intention of pulling up at the county police station and lodging information as to the suspicious visitors whom he had brought down.

"It is likely that they have a watch at the gate," said the major. "We must keep away from there. This wall is a great height. We'd best keep on until we find the easiest place to scale it."

"I could get over it here," Tom said eagerly.

"Wait a bit. A few minutes can make no difference one way or the other. Ould Sir Colin used to say that there were more battles lost by over haste than by slowness. What's the high bank running along on the right here?"

"That's a railway bankment," said Von Baumser. "See the posts and the little red lights over yonder."

"So it is. The wall seems to be to be lower here. What's this dark thing? Hullo, here's a door leading into the grounds."

"It is locked, though."

"Give me a hoist," Tom said imploringly. "Don't throw a minute away. You can't tell what may be going on inside. At this very moment, for all we know, they may be plotting her murder."

"He has right," said Von Baumser. "We shall await here until we hear from you. Help him, my friends—shove him up."

Tom caught the coping of the wall, although the broken glass upon the top cut deeply into his hands. With a great heave he swung himself up, and was soon astride upon the top.

"Here's the whistle," said the major, standing on tiptoe to reach a downstretched hand. "If you want us give a good blow at it. We'll be with you in a brace of slakes. If we can't get over the wall we'll have the door down."

Tom was in the act of letting himself drop into the wood, when suddenly the watchers below saw him crouch down upon the wall, and lie motionless as though listening intently.

"Hush!" he whispered, leaning over. "Some one is coming through the wood." The wind had died away and the storm subsided. Even from the lane they could hear the sound of feet, and of muffled voices inside the grounds. They all crouched down in the shadow of the wall. Tom lay flat upon the glass-studded coping, and no one looking from below could distinguish him from the wall itself.

(To be continued.)

Spiteful.

Miss Elder—I'm having just the loveliest gown made. It's tan cloth with old rose trimming. Don't you think that will be becoming?

Miss Chellus—Yes, the 'old' rose will be especially appropriate for you.—Philadelphia Press

GROWING HOGS IN IDAHO.

Industry Is Receiving Greater Attention Than Ever Before.

Prof. H. T. French, Director Idaho Experiment Station.

The hog industry in Idaho is receiving more attention now than ever before in the history of the state. The tendency to diversify farm operations is stronger now than in the past. All alfalfa, or all sheep or all of any other one thing, unless it should be fruit, is out of date for the majority of farmers of Idaho, both in the northern part of the state, where irrigation is not practiced, and in the irrigated sections of southern Idaho.

The most successful farmer, here as elsewhere, is the one who is making livestock on the farm one of the important factors. As the dairy industry increases in interest the raising of hogs will receive more attention. A farmer who is not adverse to milking cows will, as a rule, be a success in handling pigs, because no one can succeed in either line, to the fullest extent, unless he looks carefully after details.

In Idaho the dairy industry is growing, therefore I expect a more rapid development of the hog industry. In fact, there is a strong indication that this is the case just now in several sections of the state. In holding farmers' institutes in southern Idaho much interest was noticed in the subject of feeding and breeding hogs. Several shipments of pure bred stock have recently been made into southern Idaho. Pure bred Poland China, Duroc Jersey, Chester White and Berkshire pigs are found in increasing numbers in every farming section of the state. Poland Chinas predominate, no doubt; but the Duroc is becoming a close competitor in many sections.

Alfalfa pasture, with a small ration of shorts, ground wheat or finely ground barley, will grow pigs very rapidly. This, supplemented with separator milk, will produce a growth equal to that secured in the corn belt, and in quality we flatter ourselves that it is superior.

In growth, our pigs can be made to compare quite favorably with those fed on corn. Numerous reports were made last winter at farmers' meetings that it was not difficult to produce a pig that would weigh two hundred pounds at eight months old.

Some sugar beets and other roots can be fed, and are being used in feeding hogs in Idaho. Potatoes boiled and mixed with one and a half to two pounds of grain per hundredweight of pig, will produce good gains in live weight. Alfalfa, cut up with feed cutter, and softened by steaming or even a sprinkling of cold water, with a little grain, makes a good ration for brood sows during winter. A great many hogs are wintered largely on dry alfalfa hay, and they do very well.

In a state where so much cheap forage can be grown for hogs, there is great encouragement for the industry. Large yields of wheat and barley can be secured on irrigated lands, and often the wheat is of low milling quality, making it much more profitable to feed it than to sell it in the sack. A bushel of wheat will make from 12 to 15 pounds of gain in live weight when fed to thrifty young hogs weighing from 75 to 175 pounds. In young pigs even greater gains can be secured.

Field peas are grown in some sections for hog pasture, and serve an important purpose in providing good pasturage during the summer before the stubble fields are ready to glean. There is a period in summer when there is a lack of good pasture in the grain-growing sections of the state. Little alfalfa or clover is grown on many of the farms, and often pigs make very small gains during this period. Some farmers sow grain, such as wheat or barley, for hog pasture, but even this does not produce as good results as would a pasture of alfalfa, peas or clover.

Bluegrass and white clover will make a good pasture in some localities where there is plenty of moisture and good soil. This does not, in our opinion, give as good results, however, as the crops mentioned above. Idaho farmers are much encouraged in raising hogs from the fact that large packing plants are being established on the coast, thus insuring a steady demand for live hogs, and while the price may not be any more satisfactory than in the past, with a limited supply, there will be a permanency to the demand even though the number of hogs produced increases several times.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Valuable Information to Pacific Northwest Inquirers

By J. L. Ashlock, Washington Experiment Station, Pullman.

Elma—"I have a tract of land near Quincy, Wash., that I wish to irrigate. I'd order to do this I will have to use well water, and possibly do the pumping with a gasoline engine, or some other mechanical device. Will you please give me any information that bears on this subject?" A. L. C.

"I am quite familiar with the conditions around Quincy, and believe that irrigation in that region would bring very good results, providing the cost was not too much. In that locality the depth to water is quite considerable, and the cost of operating a pump would therefore be heavy. The farmers there use windmills quite exclusively, using gasoline engines only when the wind fails. However, the water is quite abundant when it is reached. I do not believe that it would be profitable for you to irrigate as many as ten acres unless you have a system of pipes to

conserve the water. The soil around Quincy is so light that the water will seep away and be lost, unless you put in such pipes. A ten horse-power engine would be sufficient to raise water for ten acres, but it might be necessary to sink more than one well. I am beginning to believe that irrigation will be necessary in the Quincy section to obtain the best results."

Baird—"I have been quite successful with corn in this locality, except that the corn matures rather small. Can you advise me of varieties of corn that I might try?" FARMER.

"I advise that you experiment with Kafir corn, since it seems that it will do well in your region. Try a good, early maturing Dent variety. This should be preferable to the Flint, and it certainly makes better feed. The conditions of your region require that you cultivate to retain moisture, as well as to destroy the weeds."

Chewelah—"Is wood as desirable as cement for building a silo? Is silage apt to freeze in this country? What forage plants should be grown in the Chewelah region?" STOCKMAN.

"Brome grass might do well, if the soil is not too gravelly, but it should not be grown in rocky soil. Vetches will be desirable in such soil as you have, as these plants reseed themselves. If you can get lumber at a reasonable price in your vicinity, it would be more costly to build of cement than of wood. Silage stays warm, and it is not apt to freeze in this country; but if it sticks to the sides of the silo from any cause, it should be tramped down in order to prevent it from settling unevenly."

Leahy—"I would like to know if it would be advisable to plant the Australian salt bush in this region? Has the plant any desirable qualities?" J. S.

"I advise you to let the Australian salt bush alone. The plant has a few desirable qualities, but we have heard that in the Walla Walla country it has developed into a pest. It resembles tumble weed in its manner of growth, and in windy weather will break off and roll for a great distance, scattering seed as it goes. Except when young and tender, it is undesirable for stock."

Washtucna—"I have a white clover lawn, and would like to know what sort of bone fertilizer is best to use on it." W. A. P.

"I question the advisability of using a bone fertilizer on your lawn. Commercial fertilizers are generally poorly adapted to the soils in semi-arid regions. Well-rotted manure placed on the land late in the fall and raked off in the spring would, I believe, be far more preferable. The soil in your region needs humus rather than fertilizing elements. Manure is well supplied with phosphates and nitrogen, and should therefore give your soil the needed stimulation."

Sunnyside—"Would your station advise me to feed grain hay with alfalfa? I am a dairyman, and have been feeding only alfalfa." F. W.

"I am sure that there would be economy in combining alfalfa with grain. From four to ten pounds of grain per day should be sufficient, using rolled barley rather than wheat or bran. The bran would practically be wasted. You would get good results, I believe, by feeding about one-half a pound per day of linseed meal. Alfalfa is entirely nitrogenous in composition, and should be balanced by a more concentrated form of the carbohydrates."

QUERIES BY FARMERS.

Experiment Station Called Upon for Advice on Various Subjects.

From the Washington State College, Pullman.

A Seattle correspondent asks for a statement of the experience the station has had with the "novelty vegetables." He was informed as follows:

"The station has experimented with all of them, and finds that they will grow successfully in eastern Washington. The tomato and egg plant should be started early in the season in hotbeds, or cold frames. With this care a creditable crop will be matured. The egg plant is a native of warm climates, and, like the tomato, should be given a high, warm elevation. The okra and artichoke have each done very well with us, requiring only the ordinary garden culture."

A farmer of Arden wishes to know what apples would do well where he lives. Professor Thorner advised him as follows:

"For the soil and general climatic conditions you have, I advise the use in equal quantities of the Jonathan, Rome Beauty and Wegener. It is possible that you might make use of a great many other varieties, but these are apples that the all doing well, and sell for very good market prices in the annual markets."

"Vary the number of trees, according to whether you are going to irrigate or not. If you are going to irrigate, plant your trees from twenty-five to twenty-seven feet apart, in alternate rows. If you are not going to irrigate, you had better plant them on the hexagonal plan, placing the trees in the rows thirty-three feet apart, with the rows themselves about twenty-seven feet apart. It will not injure the trees to grow vegetables between them for the first three to five years, but, of course, you should plant nothing that will take the moisture or plant food from close to the young trees."

Mild Punishment.

Stranger—In your town they close the front doors of the saloons on Sunday, and open the side doors, do they? Isn't that whipping the devil around the stump?

Native—Yes, and the whipping doesn't hurt him a bit, either.