

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

The old man was pale and nervous. The one weak point in his character was his affection for his son, an affection which he strove to hide under an austere manner, but which was none the less genuine. He had never before parted with him for any length of time, and he felt the wrench keenly. As to Ezra, he was flushed and excited at the thought of the new scenes which lay before him and the daring speculation in which he was about to embark. He flung himself into a chair and stretched his thick, muscular limbs out in front of him.

"I know as much about stones," he said exultantly, "as any man in London. I was pricing a bag of rough ones at Van Helmer's to-day, and he is reckoned a good judge. He said that no expert could have done it better."

"You deserve great credit for your quickness and perseverance," replied his father. "Your knowledge will be invaluable to you when you are at the fields. You will promise to be careful and to avoid quarrels and bloodshed."

"I won't get into any rows if I can help it," his son answered. "That's not my game."

"But if you think that there is no mistake, if your opponent is undoubtedly about to proceed to extremities, shoot him down at once, my dear lad, before he has time to draw. I have heard those who have been out there say that in such cases everything depends upon getting the first shot. I am anxious about you, and shall not be easy until I see you again."

"Blessed if he hasn't tears in his eyes!" Ezra exclaimed to himself, much astonished at this unprecedented occurrence.

"When do you go?" his father asked.

"My train leaves in an hour or so. I reach the steamer at Southampton about three in the morning, and she starts with the full tide at six. Well, good-by," said the young man, rising up and holding out his hand. "Keep your eye on Dimsdale and don't trust him."

"Good-by, my son, good-by!"

The old merchant was honestly moved, and his voice quivered as he spoke. He stood motionless for a minute or so until the heavy door slammed, and then he threw open the window and gazed sorrowfully down the street at the disappearing cab. His whole attitude expressed such dejection that his ward, who had just entered the room, felt more drawn towards him than she had ever done before. Slipping up to him, she placed her warm, tender hand upon his sympathetically.

"He will soon come back, dear Mr. Girdlestone," she said. "You must not be uneasy about him."

As she stood beside him in her white dress, with a single red ribbon round her neck and a band of the same color round her waist, she was as fair a specimen of English girlhood as could have been found in all London. The merchant's features softened as he looked down at her fresh young face, and he put out his hand as though to caress her, but some unpleasant thought must have crossed his mind, for he assumed suddenly a darker look and turned away from her without a word. More than once that night she recalled that strange spasmodic expression of something akin to horror which had passed over her guardian's features as he gazed at her.

CHAPTER VIII.

The anxious father had not very long to wait before he heard tidings of his son. Finally there came a long epistle from Kimberley, the capital of the mining district, in which the young man described his eight hundred miles drive up country and all the adventures which overtook him on the way.

"This place, Kimberley," he said in his letter, "has grown into a fair-sized town, though a few years ago it was just a camp. Now there are churches, banks, and a club in it. There are a sprinkling of well-dressed people in the streets, but the majority are grimy-looking chaps from the diggings, with slouched hats and colored shirts, rough fellows to look at, though quiet enough as a rule. Though Kimberley is the capital of the mining fields, it is not there that the actual mining is done. That goes on in a lot of little camps, which are dotted along the Vaal river for fifty or sixty miles. The stones are generally bought at the camp immediately after they have been found, and are paid for by checks on banks in Kimberley. I have, therefore, transferred our money to the South African bank here. Keep your eyes on that fellow Dimsdale, and let him know nothing of what is going on."

He wrote again about a fortnight afterwards, and his letter, as it crossed the Atlantic, passed the outward mail, which bore the news of the wonderful diamond find made by an English geologist among the Ural Mountains.

"I am now on a tour among the camps," he said. "To-morrow I push on to Delport's Hope and Larkin's Flat. I am well received wherever I go, except by the dealers. They hear that I am a London capitalist, and fear that I may sound up the prices. They little know I bought stones all the way along, but not very valuable ones, for we must husband our resources."

One day news arrived of the great discovery of diamonds among the Ural Mountains. The first intimation was received through the Central News Agency in the form of the following telegram:

"Moscow, August 22.—It is reported from Tobolsk that an important discovery of diamond fields has been made amongst the spurs of the Ural Mountains, at a point not very far from that city. They are said to have been found by an English geologist, who has exhibited many magnificent gems in proof of his assertion. These stones have been examined at Tobolsk, and are pronounced to be equal, if not superior, in quality to any found elsewhere. A company has been already formed for the purpose of purchasing the land and working the mines."

The crisis at the African fields was even more acute than had been anticipated by the conspirators. Nothing approaching to it had ever been known in South Africa before. Diamonds went steadily down in value until they were selling at a price which no dealer would have believed possible, and the sale of claims reached such a climax that men were glad to get rid of them for the mere price of the plant and machinery erected at them. The offices of the various dealers at Kimberley were besieged night and day by an importunate crowd of miners who were willing to sell at any price in order to save something from the general ruin which they imagined was about to come upon the industry. Some, more long-headed or more desperate than their neighbors, continued to work their claims and to keep the stones which they found until prices might be better. As fresh mails came from the Cape, however, each confirming and amplifying the ominous news, these independent workers grew fewer and more faint-hearted, for their boys had to be paid each week, and where was the money to come from with which to pay them? The dealers, too, began to take the alarm, and the most tempting offers would hardly induce them to give hard cash in exchange for stones which might prove to be a drug on the market. Everywhere there was misery and stagnation.

Ezra Girdlestone was not slow to take advantage of this state of things, but he was too cunning to do so in a manner which might call attention to himself or his movements. In his wanderings he had come across an outcast named Farintosh, a man who had once been a clergyman and a master of arts of Trinity College, Dublin, but who was now a broken-down gambler with a slender purse and a still more slender conscience. He still retained a plausible manner and an engaging address and these qualities first recommended him to the notice of the young merchant. A couple of days after the receipt of the news from Europe, Ezra sent for this fellow and sat with him for some time on the verandah of the hotel talking over the situation.

"You see," said Ezra, "I have the name here of having a long purse and of knowing which way the wind blows. If I were to be seen buying, others would follow my lead, and prices would soon be as high as ever. Now what I propose is to work through you, d'ye see? You can go the round of the camps and buy in stones on the quiet without attracting much attention. Beat them down as low as you can, and give this hotel as your address. When they call here they shall be paid, which is better than having you carrying the money round with you."

The clergyman scowled as though he thought it was anything but better. He did not make any remark, however.

"You can get one or two fellows to help you," said Ezra. "You know who would be likely men. I can't expect you to work all the camps yourself. Of course, if you offer more for a stone than I care to give, that's your lookout, but if you do your work well you shall not be the loser. You shall have a percentage on business done, and a weekly salary as well."

"How much money do you care to invest?" asked Farintosh.

"I'm not particular," Ezra answered. "If I do a thing I like to do it well. I'll go the length of thirty thousand pounds."

Farintosh was so astonished at the magnitude of the sum that he sank back in his chair in bewilderment. "Why, sir," he said, "I think just at present you could buy the country for that."

Ezra laughed. "We'll make it go as far as we can," he said. "Of course you may buy claims as well as stones."

"And I have carte blanche to that amount?"

"Certainly."

"All right, I'll begin this evening," said the ex-priest, and picking up his slouched hat, which he still wore somewhat broader in the brim than his comrades, in deference to old associations, he departed upon his mission.

Farintosh was a clever man, and soon chose two active subordinates. These were a navy, named Burt, and Williams, a young Welshman, who had disappeared from home behind a cloud of forged checks, and having changed his name had made a fresh start in life to the south of the equator. These three worked day and night buying in stones from the more needy and impecunious miners, to whom ready money was a matter of absolute necessity. Farintosh bought in the stock, too, of several small dealers whose nerves had been shaken by the panic. In this way bag after bag was filled with diamonds by Ezra.

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He was becoming somewhat uneasy in his mind as to how long the delusion would be kept up, or how soon news might come from the Cape that the Ural find had been examined into and proved to be a myth. In any case, he thought that he would be free from suspicion. Still, it might be as well for him by that time to be upon his homeward journey, for he knew that if by any chance the true facts leaked out there would be no hope of mercy from the furious diggers. Hence, he incited Farintosh to greater speed, and that worthy divine with his two agents worked so energetically that in less than a week there was little left of five and thirty thousand pounds.

Ezra Girdlestone had shown his power of reading character when he chose the ex-clergyman as his subordinate. It is possible, however, that the young man's judgment had been inferior to his powers of observation. A clever man as a trusty ally is a valuable article, but when the said cleverness may be turned against his employer the advantage becomes a questionable one.

It was perfectly evident to Farintosh that though a stray capitalist might risk a thousand pounds or so on a speculation of this sort, Rothschild himself would hardly care to invest such a sum as had passed through his hands without having some ground on which to go. Having formed this conclusion, and having also turned over in his mind the remarkable coincidence that the news of this discovery in Russia should follow so very rapidly upon the visit of the junior partner of the House of Girdlestone, the astute clergyman began to have some dim perception of the truth. Hence, he brooded a

good deal as he went about his work, and cogitated deeply in a manner which was once again distinctly undesirable in so very intelligent a subordinate.

These broodings and cogitations culminated in a meeting, which was held by him with his two sub-agents in the private parlor of the Digger's Retreat. It was a low-roofed, smoke-stained room. Round a solid, old-fashioned table in the center of this apartment sat Ezra's staff of assistants, the parson thoughtful, but self-satisfied, the others sullen and inquisitive. Farintosh had convened the meeting, and his comrades had an idea that there was something in the wind. They waited for him to speak.

"Well," the ex-clergyman said at last, "the game is nearly over, and we'll not be wanted any more. Girdlestone's off to England in a day or two."

Burt and Williams groaned sympathetically. Work was scarce in the diggings during the crisis, and their agencies had been paying them well.

"Yes, he's off," Farintosh went on, glancing keenly at his companions, "and he takes with him five and thirty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds that we bought for him. We have to do the work, and then are thrown aside as you would throw your pick aside when you are done with it. When he sells out in London and makes his pile, it won't much matter to him that the three men who helped him are starving in Griqualand."

"Won't he give us something at parting?" asked Burt, the navy. He was a savage-looking, hairy man, with a brick-colored face and overhanging eyebrows.

"Won't he give us nothing to remember him by?"

"Give you something?" Farintosh said with a sneer. "Why, man, he says you are too well paid already."

"Does he, though?" cried the navy, flushing even redder than nature had made him. "Is that the way he speaks after we makes him? It ain't on the square. I likes to see things honest an' above board betwixt man an' man, and this 'pitchin' of them as has helps ye over ain't that?"

Farintosh lowered his voice and bent further over the table. His companions involuntarily imitated his movement, until the three cunning, cruel faces were looking closely into one another's eyes.

"Nobody knows that he holds those stones," said Farintosh. "He's too smart to let it out to any one by ourselves."

"Where does he keep 'em?" asked the Welshman.

"In a safe in his room. This," said Farintosh, taking a small key from his pocket, "is a duplicate, and will open the safe. I took a moulding from his key while I was speaking to him."

The navy laughed hoarsely. "If that don't lick creation for smartness!" he cried. "And how are we to get to this safe? It would serve him right if we collar the lot. I'll teach him that if he ain't honest by nature he's got to be when he deals with the like of us. I like straightness, and I'll have it!"

He brought his great fist down upon the table to emphasize this commendable sentiment.

"It's not an easy matter," Farintosh said thoughtfully. "When he goes out he locks his door and there's no getting in at the window. There's only one chance for us that I can see. His room is a bit cut off from the rest of the hotel. There's a gallery of twenty feet or more than leads to it. Now, I was thinking that if the three of us were to visit him some evening, just to wish him luck on his journey, as it were, and if, while we were in the room something sudden was to happen which would knock him silly for a minute or two, we might walk off with the stones and be clean gone before he could raise an alarm."

"And what would knock him silly?" asked Williams. He was an unhealthy, scurvy-looking youth, and his pallid complexion had assumed a greenish tinge of fear as he listened to the clergyman's words. He had the makings in him of a mean and dangerous criminal, but not of a violent one—belonging to the jackal tribe rather than to the tiger.

"Meet here at eight o'clock to-morrow night," said the leader. "We can get it over by nine, and we will have the night for our escape. I'll have the horses ready, and it will be strange if we don't get such a start as will puzzle them."

So having arranged all the details of their little plan, these three gentlemen departed in different directions, Farintosh to the Oriental Hotel to give Ezra his evening report, and the others to the mining camps, which were the scenes of their labors.

(To be continued.)

Table Repartee.

"Say," confided the red-bordered napkin, "I am really smitten with the pretty stenographer who lunches here every day, but she throws me over as soon as she rises from the table."

"Yes," sighed the salt crust, "I'm sweet on her myself, but she always gives me the shake."

Never.

Amateur—What do you think of the artist Albino who painted a spiderweb on the ceiling so naturally that a chambermaid spent a whole morning trying to sweep it off?

Critic—There may be such artists, but I don't believe in the existence of such a chambermaid.

There Is Hope.

Husband—When I see all these bills I am tired of life. Do you think the time will ever come when we shall be out of debt?

Wife (cheerfully)—Why not, darling? You know that you are carrying an exceptionally large life insurance.

A Hot One.

The Poet's Wife—My husband read this poem at a public celebration before thousands of people. Alas! it was the last poem he ever wrote.

The Editor—I see. Did they lynch him or shoot him?

Not Legal Tender.

Grateful Patient—Doctor, I owe my life to you.

Doctor—That's all right, but I can't take it in payment for my services.



Good Sheep Barn a Poor One.

A good sheep barn is a poor one. This may seem to be absurd, but the facts support such a statement. There is no question but that many flocks are rendered unhealthy and therefore less productive by reason of too close housing. In few sections do sheep need more than a windbreak and rain shed. Some of our best shepherds have kept their flocks for decades with only such sheds as would prevent the flock being exposed to direct winds, rain and snow-storms.

The cut shows the type of sheep barn found on the farm of a successful shepherd, which might be copied with success. In this instance the sheep are kept upon forage crops grown in four adjacent lots. The flock may be turned into any lot at pleasure.

It is well to have this building equipped with a large ventilating window in the end near the gable or two small windows such as shown in the sketch. These, however, should be



SOILING SHEEP FOLD.

equipped with a sash that may be closed in severe weather.

Many farms where sheep are kept are equipped with a barn cellar in which the flock has been kept with varying success. The barn cellar is an excellent place for sheep if rightly arranged. There should be plenty of openings to the south, allowing sun to reach all parts of the stable so as to keep it thoroughly dry. Thorough drainage is essential.

There must be ventilation at the rear of the stable. A bad practice is to keep the sheep in stables on stable manure, says Farm and Home. The fermenting manure destroys the color and texture of wool. A hint which has been worth many dollars to me is to use only long straw, hay or weeds for bedding sheep. If short straw or sawdust is used it gets into the fleece and is an everlasting nuisance.

Profitable Cattle Feeding.

The Missouri Experiment Station at Columbia has issued a very elaborate and handsomely illustrated bulletin on the most successful methods of fattening cattle, by Dean H. J. Waters.

This bulletin summarizes the experience and conclusions of about 1,000 of the most experienced and successful cattle feeders of Missouri, Illinois and Iowa, and contains also a summary of the results of a large number of tests with different kinds of feed, different ages of cattle, etc., conducted by the Experiment Station of Columbia.

It considers such practical questions as the most profitable age to fatten cattle, the proper weight, the best season of the year, the best method of preparing feed, the best of shelter, the market demands, the best sort of roughness, etc. It is illustrated with cuts of the different types of beef cattle, including excellent illustrations of the fat steer herd exhibited by the college this season at the Interstate Fair, Kansas City, the Missouri State Fair, Sedalia, the American Royal, Kansas City, and the International Live Stock Exposition, Chicago. These steers won nine championship prizes, seventeen first prizes, sixteen second prizes, seven third prizes and two fourth prizes. Every steer won at every show excepting one steer in one show.

Roots for Farm Animals.

If roots are stored in a pit in the field a high, dry place should be chosen. If the ground is clayey the roots should be placed on top of the ground. If it is gravelly and drainage is good a shallow pit about 5 feet wide and of necessary length may be shovelled out. The roots should be carefully placed in a gable shaped pile about 5 feet wide and as long as convenient. A thin layer of straw should then be laid over the pile and this covered with six or eight inches of earth. Another and thicker layer of straw and a final layer of earth will complete the work. Ventilators should be placed at intervals of ten or fifteen feet, which should be closed when sweating has ceased. The pit should not be opened on warm days in winter. A ditch for drainage should be cut around the pit. Roots stored in this way do not keep as well as when stored in a good cellar; therefore, they should be fed out as early as possible.—New York Cornell Experiment Station.

Apple Tree Canker.

Treatment recommended for canker of apple trees by one of the experiment stations is to paint the affected trunk with a combination of one pint whale oil soap, three pints slacked lime and four gallons of water; thicken to right consistency with wood ashes or with Bordeaux mixture, thickening with lime until like whitewash.

Flax in the Northwest.

The second factor making for the new prosperity may be termed "the discovery of flax." For years there had been a few scattering flax fields, but it was only in the middle '90's that the Northwestern pioneer awoke to the discovery that linseed oil was of more truly golden hue, not only than the wheat field, but than any gold-bearing quartz California ever saw. And so the endless golden yellow of the fields in August and the tinkling bells in September or the flax field.

Those who have never heard the ringing of the flax bells have missed a truly wonderful sensation. The round seed pods, smaller than peas, which contain the seed, give a faint metallic sound which as one drives or walks through a field, setting thousands in motion, seems like myriads of infinitesimal bells tinkling so faintly as to be all but inaudible. Nor is the mere sight of a flax field in the mellow August soon to be forgotten. Imagine a 100-acre field, filled with flowers of a blue more delicate than violets. And of its profitable character one illustration will suffice. In June, 1900, Ole Jannsen bought 160 acres in the heart of the great flax belt for \$10 an acre on the crop payment plan. Ole "broke up" that fall and the next spring 135 acres and planted it in flax. In round numbers, he thrashed in the fall eighteen and one-half bushels to the acre; sold it for \$1.39½ a bushel, total, \$3,500; a little more than twice enough to pay for his land out of his first crop. Not only was the flax immensely profitable itself, but it removed from the country the stigma, "one-crop country."

—World Today.

Buried Seed.

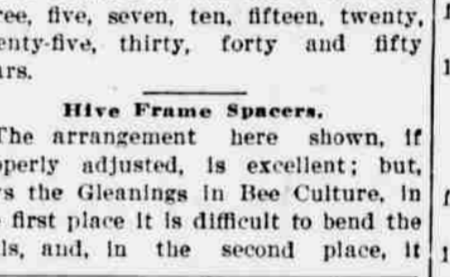
The Department of Agriculture has undertaken a series of experiments intended to answer, if possible, the old question, "How long can seeds remain buried in the soil and still retain their power of germination?"

Many extraordinary stories have been told of the prolongation of the vitality of seeds during many years, and even centuries, but very few actual experiments have hitherto been made.

Dr. Beal has reported that he has found seeds that responded to germination tests after having been buried twenty years. The seeds buried by the experts of the Agricultural Department at the Arlington farm last year were packed with dry clay in porous clay pots, covered with saucers and placed at various depths from 6 inches to 3½ feet. There are 32 complete sets, in 3,584 pots, representing 100 species, 84 genera and 34 families. Tests are to be made at the end of one, two, three, five, seven, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, forty and fifty years.

Hive Frame Spacers.

The arrangement here shown, if properly adjusted, is excellent; but, says the Gleanings in Bee Culture, in the first place it is difficult to bend the nails, and, in the second place, it



BENT NAILS IN FRAME.

would be more difficult still to bend them all with exactly the same curve, for it would be important to have the bee spaces alike. In the third place, one would have to bore a hole in order to drive them into the frame for the reason that the hammer head would strike one side of the line of penetration of the wood, bending the nail over. Taking it all in all, the ordinary staple is much easier to insert and far cheaper.

Location of Beehives.

Beehives should never be faced toward the north. In a northern latitude a northern exposure in winter is almost sure to cause the loss of the colony, by the rigorous north winds blowing in at the entrance, and the confinement of the bees, caused by the entrances being shaded on mild, sunny days when the bees in the hives facing southward fly freely.

Size and Capacity in Cisterns.

In digging a round cistern, 8 feet in diameter and 17 feet deep, will hold 202 barrels of 31½ gallons. If 10 feet in diameter and 11 feet deep, it will hold 205 barrels.

Farm Notes.

Do not have the sheep pens too warm. The natural coat of the sheep makes it able to endure severe weather.

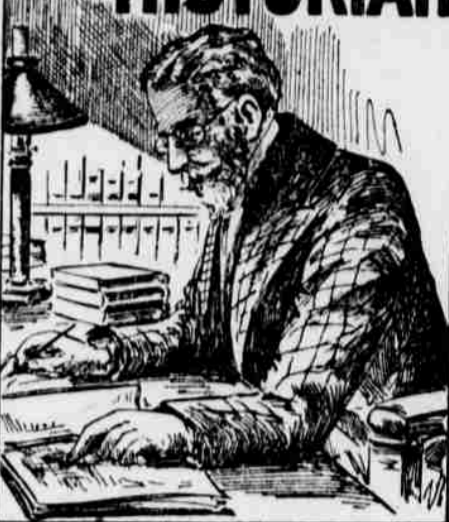
If the members of the poultry flock which seldom or never lay could be weeded out, the feed bills would be less and the egg profits more.

Change the hog pasture often. Have a small house built on skids so it can be dragged around to a new pasture as desired. If hogs are fed long in one place the grass is killed out.

One poultry raiser says he feeds rony chickens whole corn that has been well soaked in kerosene, and bathes the swollen heads and eyes with a mixture of equal parts of kerosene and lard.

In the highly fertilized garden the aim is to keep crops coming on in as rapid succession as possible. Plan so as to have one variety ready to take the place of the crop which has been matured and harvested.

THE WEEKLY HISTORIAN



1437—Murder of James I. of Scotland.

1525—Imperialists defeated the French at battle of Pavia.

1544—Diet of Spiers opened.

1547—Coronation of Edward VI., when only 10 years of age.

1587—Thomas Cavendish passed the Straits of Magellan.

621—Miles Standish chosen captain of Plymouth colonies.

1746—Brussels taken by Marshal Saxe.

1776—William Scarborough, one of the builders of the Savannah, the first steamer that crossed the Atlantic, born in Belfast, S. C.

1777—Col. Neilson, with a party of American militia, defeated British troops under Major Stockton, American Congress commissioned five major generals.

1778—Lord North's conciliatory bill presented in Parliament.

1780—New York ceded her rights in western lands to the United States.

1781—Congress appointed Robert Morris superintendent of finance.

1793—British flag raised over Corsica.

1797—Trinidad captured by the British under Sir Ralph Abercromby. . . . French and Austrians resumed hostilities in Italy.

1803—Ohio admitted to the Union.

1800—Drury Lane theater, London, destroyed by fire.

1810—Andreas Hofer, the Tyrolean patriot, shot by the French.

1813—British and Canadian soldiers captured Ogdensburg, N. Y.

1814—Henry Kirke Brown, who produced the first bronze statue ever executed in the United States, born at Leyden, Mass.

1834—United States concluded an indemnity treaty with Spain.

1858—City of Corinth, Greece, badly damaged by earthquake.

1862—"Thad" Lincoln, favorite son of the President, died at the White House. . . . Jefferson Davis inaugurated President of the Confederate States at Richmond.

1863—Arizona territory formed from New Mexico.

1864—Second Confederate Congress met at Richmond.

1866—President Johnson publicly denounced the reconstruction committee and declared Congress to be in rebellion against the government of the United States.

1867—Maximilian entered Queretaro.