

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
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CHAPTER X.

During the months which Ezra Girdlestone had spent in Africa the affairs of the firm in Fenchurch street had been exceedingly prosperous. Trade upon the coast had been brisker than usual, and three of the company's ships had come in at short intervals with excellent cargoes. Among these was the Black Eagle, which, to the astonishment of Captain Hamilton Mizes and the disgust of his employer, had weathered a severe gale in the Channel, and had arrived safe and sound once more. This run of luck, supplemented by the business capacity of the old merchant and the indomitable energy of young Dimsdale, made the concern look so flourishing that the former felt more than ever convinced that if he could but stave off the immediate danger things would soon right themselves. Hence he read with delight the letters from Africa, in which his son narrated the success of the conspiracy and the manner in which the miners had been hoodwinked. The old man's figure grew straighter and his step more firm as the conviction grew upon him that the company would soon return once again to its former condition of affluence.

It may be imagined, therefore, that when the rumors of a bona fide diamond find in the Orange Free State came to his ears John Girdlestone was much agitated and distressed. On the same day that he saw the announcement in the papers he received a letter from his son announcing the failure of their enterprise. After narrating the robbery, the pursuit, the death of Farintosh and the announcement of the new discovery, it gave an account of his subsequent movements.

"As to our speculation, the letter said, it is, of course, all up. Even when the Russian business proves to be a hoax, the price of stones will remain very low on account of these new fields. It is possible that we may sell our lot at some small profit, but it won't be the royal road to a fortune that you prophesied, nor will it help the firm out of the rut into which you have shoved it. My only regret in leaving Africa like this is that Williams will have no one to prosecute him."

This letter was a rude shock to the African merchant. Within a week of the receipt of it his son Ezra, gloomy and travel stained, walked into the sanctum at Fenchurch street and confirmed all the old tidings by word of mouth. The old man was of too tough a fiber to break down completely, but his body hands closed convulsively upon the arms of the chair, and a cold perspiration broke out upon his wrinkled forehead as he listened to such details as his son vouchsafed to afford him.

"You have your stones all safe, though?" he stammered out at last.

"They are in my box at home," said Ezra, gloomy and morose, leaning against the white marble mantelpiece. "We'll be lucky if we clear as much as they cost and a margin for my expenses and Lanzworthy's. A broken head is all that I have got from your fine scheme."

"Who could foresee such a thing?" the old man said, plaintively. "The fall in prices is sure to be permanent?"

"It will last for some years, anyway," Ezra answered. "The Jagersfontein gravel is very rich, and there seems to be plenty of it."

"And within a few months we must repay both capital and interest. We are ruined!" The old merchant spoke in a broken voice, and his head sank upon his breast. "When that day comes," he continued, "the firm which has been for thirty years above reproach, and a model to the whole city, will be proclaimed as a bankrupt concern. Worse still, it will be shown to have been kept afloat for years by means which will be deemed fraudulent. I tell you, my dear son, that if any means could be devised which would avert this—any means—I should not hesitate to adopt them. I am a frail old man, and I feel that the short balance of my life would be a small thing for me to give in return for the assurance that the work which I have built up should not be altogether thrown away."

"Your life cannot affect the matter one way or the other unless it were more heavily insured than it is," Ezra said, coolly, though somewhat moved by his father's intensity of manner. "Perhaps there is some way out of the wood yet," he added, in a more cheerful tone.

"It's so paying, so prosperous—that's what goes to my heart. If it had ruined itself it would be easier to bear it, but it is sacrificed to outside speculations—my wretched, wretched speculations. That is what makes it so hard." He touched the bell, and Gilray answered the summons. "Listen to this, Ezra. What was our turn over last month, Gilray?"

"Fifteen thousand pounds, sir," said the little clerk, bobbing up and down like a buoy in a gale in his delight at seeing the junior partner once again.

"And the expenses?"

"Nine thousand three hundred. Uncommon brown you look, Mr. Ezra, to be sure, uncommon brown and well. I hope as you enjoyed yourself in Africa, sir, and was too much for them Hottentots and Boars." With this profound ethnological remark Mr. Gilray bobbed himself out of the room and went back radiantly to his ink-stained desk.

"Look at that," the old man said, when the clerk of the outer door showed that the clerk was out of earshot. "Over five thousand profit in a month. Is it not terrible that such a business should go to ruin? What a fortune it would have been for you?"

"It must be saved!" cried Ezra with meditative brows and hands plunged deep in his trouser pockets. "There is that

girl's money. Could we not get the temporary use of it?"

"Impossible!" his father answered with a sigh. "It is so tied up in the will that she cannot sign it away herself until she comes of age. There is no way of touching it except by her marriage—or by her death."

"Then we must have it by the only means open to us."

"And that is?"

"I must marry her."

"You will?"

"I shall. Here is my hand on it."

"Then we are saved," cried the old man, throwing up his tremulous hands. "Girdlestone & Son will weather the storm yet."

"But Girdlestone becomes a sleeping partner," said Ezra. "It's for my own sake I do it and not for yours," with which frank remark he drew his hat down over his brows and set off for Eccleston square.

One day, as Thomas Dimsdale was making his way cityward at a rather earlier hour than was customary with him, he missed the usual apparition at the window. Looking round blankly in search of some explanation of this absence, he perceived in the garden a pretty white bonnet which glinted among the leaves, and on closed inspection a pair of bright eyes, which surveyed him merrily from underneath it. The gate was open. It may be imagined that he was somewhat late at the office that morning and on many subsequent mornings, until the clerks began to think that their new employer was losing the enthusiasm for business which had possessed him.

It chanced that one morning the interview between the lovers had lasted rather longer than usual, and had been concluded by Kate's returning to the house, while Tom remained sitting upon the garden seat lost in such a reverie as affects men in his position. While thus pleasantly employed, his thoughts were suddenly recalled to earth by the appearance of a dark shadow on the gravel in front of him, and looking up he saw the senior partner standing a short distance away and regarding him with anything but an amiable expression upon his face. He had himself been having a morning stroll in the garden, and had overseen the whole of the recent interview without the preoccupied lovers being aware of his presence.

"Are you coming to the office?" he asked sternly, "if so, we can go together."

Tom rose and followed him out of the garden without a word. He knew from the other's expression that all was known to him, and in his heart he was not sorry. His only fear was that the old man's anger might fall upon his ward, and this he determined to prevent. They walked side by side as far as the station in complete silence, but on reaching Fenchurch street Girdlestone asked his young partner to step into his private sanctum.

"Now, sir," he said, as he closed the door behind him, "I think that I have a right to inquire what the meaning may be of the scene of which I was an involuntary witness this morning?"

"It means," Tom answered firmly but gently, "that I am engaged to Miss Harston, and have been for some time."

"Oh, indeed," Girdlestone answered coldly, sitting down at his desk and turning over the pile of letters.

During the long silent walk the merchant had been revolving in his mind what course he should pursue, and he had come to the conclusion that it was more easy to guide this impetuous stream of youth than to attempt to stem it. He did not realize the strength of the tie that bound these two young people together, and imagined that with judgment and patience it might yet be snapped. It was, therefore, with as good an imitation of geniality as his angular visage would permit of that he answered his companion's confession.

"You can hardly wonder at my being surprised," he said. "Such a thing never entered my mind for a moment. You would have done better to have confided in me before."

"I must ask your pardon for not having done so."

"As far as you are concerned," said John Girdlestone affably, "I believe you to be hardworking and right principled. Your conduct since you joined the firm has been everything that I could desire."

Tom bowed his acknowledgments, much pleased by the preamble.

"With regard to my ward," continued the senior partner, speaking very slowly and evidently weighing his words, "I could not wish for her to have a better husband. In considering such a question I have, however, as you may imagine, to consult above everything else the wishes of my dead friend, Mr. John Harston, the father of the young lady to whom you say you are engaged. A trust has been reposed in me, and that trust must, of course, be fulfilled to the letter."

"Certainly," said Tom, wondering in his own mind how he could ever have brought himself for one moment to think evil of this kindly old man.

"It was one of Mr. Harston's most dearly expressed wishes that no words or even thoughts of such matters should be allowed to come in his daughter's way until she had attained maturity, by which he meant the age of one-and-twenty."

"But he could not foresee the circumstances," Tom pleaded. "I am sure that a year or so will make no difference in her sentiments in this matter."

"My duty is to carry out his instructions to the letter. I won't say, however," continued Mr. Girdlestone, "that circumstances might not arise which might induce me to shorten this probationary period. If my further acquaintance with you confirms the high impression which I now have of your commercial ability, that of course would have weight with me; and again, if I find that Miss Harston's mind is made up upon the point, that also would influence my judgment."

"And what are we to do in the meantime?" asked the junior partner anxiously.

"In the meantime neither you nor your people must write to her, or speak to her, or hold any communication with her whatever. If I find you or them doing so, I shall be compelled, in justice to Mr. Harston's last request, to send her to some establishment abroad where she shall be entirely out of your way. My mind is irrevocably made up upon that point. It is not a matter of personal inclination, but of conscience."

"And how long is this to last?" cried Tom.

"It will depend upon yourselves. If you prove yourself to be a man of honor in this matter I may be inclined to sanction your addresses. In the meantime, you must give me your word to let it rest, and neither to attempt to speak to Miss Harston nor to see her, nor to allow your parents to communicate with her. The last condition may seem to you to be hard, but, in my eyes, it is a very important one. Unless you can bring yourself to promise all this, my duty will compel me to remove my ward entirely out of your reach, a course which would be painful to her and inconvenient to myself."

"But I must let her know of this arrangement. I must tell her that you hold out hopes to us on condition that we keep apart for a time."

"It would be cruel not to allow you to do that," Girdlestone answered. "You may send her one letter, but, remember, there shall be no reply to it."

"Thank you, sir; thank you!" Tom cried, fervently. "I have something to live for now. This separation will but make our hearts grow fonder. What change can time make in either of us?"

"Quite so," said John Girdlestone, with a smile. "Remember, there must be no more walking through the square. You must remain absolutely apart if you wish to gain my consent."

"It is hard, very, very hard. But I will promise to do it. What would I not promise which would lead to our earlier union?"

"That is settled then. In the meantime, I should be obliged if you would go down to the docks and look after the loading of the transferable corrugated iron houses for New Calabar."

"All right, sir, and thank you for your kindness," said Tom, bowing himself out. He hardly knew whether to be pleased or grieved over the result of his interview; but on the whole, satisfaction prevailed, since at the worst it was but to wait for a year or so, while there seemed to be some hopes of gaining the guardian's consent before that. On the other hand, he had pledged himself to separate from Kate, but that would, he reflected, only make their reunion the sweeter.

When the hour of luncheon arrived no thought of food was in the lad's head, but, burying himself in the back parlor of a little Blackwall public house, he called for pen, ink and paper, and proceeded to indite a letter to his sweetheart. Never was so much love and comfort and advice and hope compressed into the limits of four sheets of paper or contained in the narrow boundary of a single envelope. Tom read it over after he had finished, and felt that it feebly expressed his thoughts; but then, what lover ever yet did succeed in getting his thoughts satisfactorily represented upon paper. Having posted this effusion, in which he had carefully explained the conditions imposed upon him, Tom felt considerably more light-hearted, and returned with renewed vigor to the loading of the corrugated iron. He would hardly have felt so satisfied had he seen John Girdlestone receiving that same letter from the hands of the footman, and reading it afterwards in the privacy of his bedroom with a sardonic smile upon his face. Still less contented would he have been had he beheld the merchant tearing it into small fragments and making a bonfire of it in his capacious grate. Next morning Kate looked in vain out of the accustomed window, and was sore at heart when no tall figure appeared in sight, and no friendly hand waved a morning salutation.

(To be continued.)

HOW TO WIN BATTLES.

Men Who Hit What They Shoot at the Determining Factor in War.

Other things being equal, good shooting is the determining factor in war. Poorly drilled and hastily organized bodies of men can give a good account of themselves if they know how to shoot and hit what they shoot at.

In our war for independence, says Army and Navy Life, the colonists were woodsmen. They carried and used their arms to supply their homes with food and to protect them from the savage. As marksmen they vastly outclassed the British, and that more than anything else gave Washington the final victory.

Again, in our great Civil War mark the effect of a general knowledge of firearms. In the South were sporting people. They were fond of riding and hunting. Shooting at target and at game entered into their sports and pastimes. The North was commercial. Its men knew little or nothing of firearms save the flintlocks of their grandfathers, objects of curiosity in their shops or homes, except in the far West, where the life of 1776 was still being lived. The result was that in the East the southern troops were generally victorious for a couple of years until the northern troops learned to shoot. What little success the North had was in the West, where they were little better than a standoff.

Had Reformed.

Askitt—What kind of a man is Hyker?

Noit—Oh, I guess he's all right now, but he was engaged in a shady business a few years ago.

Askitt—What was the nature of the business?

Noit—He manufactured awnings.

Helpful Suggestion.

Miss May Dupp—I just can't bear to walk out in the wind; it roughens my complexion so.

Miss Pert—Make your complexion's too thick; if you'd put it on thinner it might not do that.

If They Did.

"Would be a blessing without price. The lesson thus to teach. If all the folks who give advice. Would practice what they preach. Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Pa's Classification.

Little Willie—Say, pa, is it proper to refer to an airship as an aerial greyhound?

Pa—No, my son; the airship is in the sky-terrier class.

FARMS AND FARMERS



How to Maintain the Fertility.

It is a noted fact that where legumes are grown on land, say two-fifths of the time, which certainly should be the case, the nitrogen supply is held. It is also well known that the feeding of the crops grown on the same farm, the proper care of the barnyard manure, and its application to the lands, will return all the fertilizing ingredients with the exception of such as compose the animal body, and such other products as wool, cheese and butter as are sold from the farm. They are actually lost to the soil forever. This loss is represented on phosphorus and potassium compounds, and can be supplied in three distinct ways only. They can be purchased in the form of feeding stuffs for farm animals, finding their way to the soil through the manure; or, they may be secured directly by commercial fertilizers; and again by the subsoil running down to a depth of 3 or 4 feet from the surface.

Roots of all crops go down into the soil from 2 to 6 feet, and take directly the ingredients from the subsoil, and upon their decay tend to increase its porosity. This assists the capillary movements of water, which reacts as an agent to carry fertilizing ingredients as they become soluble in the lower soils up to near the surface, where they are readily available to the feeding roots of succeeding crops.

For Picking Cherries.

With the aid of an improved fruit gatherer designed by an Indiana man, the most delicate of small fruits, such as cherries, can be severed from their stems without mutilation, infecting or soiling of the fruit in the least, and without the necessity of the hands of the person coming in contact with the fruit. As shown in the illustration, the gatherer is of a size to be easily manipulated by the hand. In one end is an opening, to freely admit the fruit, a stationary blade and a movable blade being placed in advance of the opening. By this novel arrangement of the fixed blade and the disposition of the movable blade and its arm, the movement of the one blade past the other, besides effectively severing the stems, tends to impel the severed fruit into the opening. In practice the device is held in either hand, and as the stems of the fruit are cut it slides down the incline and into the receptacle. When the latter is filled the contents are easily discharged through the hinged lid at the end.

Be on the Safe Side.

If the herd milk is separated on the home farm and only the cream sent to the factory there is no danger of the patrons getting an infected supply of skim milk from a source outside their own farms. The farm separator will protect him from acquiring tuberculosis from the neighbor's herd, which may be spread through the medium of the skim milk returned from the creamery. Farmers and dairymen who are feeding young stock the creamery skimmed milk should by all means have a good separator and by so doing insure their herd against infection.—F. L. Risley.

Odds and Ends.

Sheep growers near Roseburg, Ore., are offering \$40 per head for every coyote killed.

There are more than six and a half million of farm families in the United States, and they produce enough food for themselves and the other 12,000,000 families who live in the cities and towns.

The telephone is now being largely used in the country districts for the benefit of the bedridden persons, who are connected with church pulpits and are thus enabled to hear the sermon and singing.

Luther Burbank's thornless cactus, which promises to be a valuable forage plant, grows to a length of about three feet by one foot wide, three inches thick, and has a surface similar to that of a watermelon.

A twenty-three-acre apple orchard recently sold by John Touchette of Centerville, Ill., for \$25,000 cash. The orchard is twenty-one years old, and its annual crop has brought from \$5,000 to \$8,000 for several years.

A bill has been introduced in Congress to establish postal savings banks which are to pay 2 per cent to the depositors and to be under the supervision of the Postmaster General and Secretary of the Treasury.

Expert peach growers of Michigan say that the hard freeze of last year will prove a benefit, as it really cleared out and rid the State of hundreds of worthless orchards. New ones will be planted to take their place.

The International Harvester Company has been found guilty on forty-two counts by a Kansas jury at Topeka for violation of the trust law. The penalty is \$1,000 on each count, but the company has taken an appeal.

New England farmers make good money by selling ferns, which grow plentifully in the rocky highlands. Pickers are paid 40 cents per 1,000, tied up in bunches of twenty-five and delivered at the railroad station. A crop can only be picked every second year.

Exhausting the Soil.

When a country has been farmed for forty years or more strictly on a grain-farming basis, things begin to look pretty desolate, unless legume crops have been raised extensively; and, as a rule, where such short-sighted methods of farming are in practice the value of legumes is given little heed.

FLASHES OF FUN

Farmer Squashleigh—I had a letter from Jack at college yesterday. Farmer Wayback—How much did he strike you for?—Somerville Journal.

"You don't agree then that 'seeing is believing'?" "Not much! I see some people every day that I never could believe."—Philadelphia Press.

Friend—I suppose the baby is fond of you? Papa—Fond of me? Why, he sleeps all day when I'm not at home and stays up all night just to enjoy my society!—Town and Country.

"John, do you love me?" "Yes." "Do you adore me?" "I s'pose." "Will you always love me?" "Ye—look here, woman, what have you gone and ordered sent home now?"—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Finnegan—These scales is no good fur me at all, at all. They only weigh the heft of 200 pounds, an' I weigh near to 250. Flanagan—Well, man alive, can't ye git on thim twice?—Philadelphia Ledger.

"Don't you think that some men make a mistake in adopting politics as a career?" "Yes, but it isn't as serious as the mistake that politics makes in adopting some men as its representatives."—Washington Star.

"You paid that man a great compliment when you elected him to office." "Yes," answered Farmer Cornossee, "an' the compliment sort o' started a habit. He has expected everything complimentary ever since."—Washington Star.

Wilkins—Blinks says he does not know you at all. Blinks—I'm not surprised. He never sees me, you know. Wilkins—But I thought you were members of the same church? Blinks—Yes, but I invariably take up the collections.

Mr. Green—No, my dear; I will not tell you what I'm going to give you for your birthday. Why can't you women be content to wait and enjoy being surprised? Mrs. Green—Oh, tell me now! If you keep your word, I'll be surprised enough.

"If you marry Grace," exclaimed an irate father to his son, "I'll cut you off without a penny, and you won't have so much as a piece of pork to boil in the pot." "Well," said the young man, "Grace before me!" And he immediately went in search of a minister.

His fiancée—Oh, yes, it's lovely being engaged to you, Jack. But I do wish you were a rich man, dear. He—How rich, darling? His fiancée—Oh, rich enough for me to be able to snub the people I detest and still have them call me amiable.—London Opinion.

"And now, Uncle Ezra," she said just before the guests had begun to arrive, "please remember not to eat your pie with your knife." "All right, Lizzie, but I wish you'd tell that young woman that waits on the table to give me an extra spoon."—Chicago Record-Herald.

First Stranger—Excuse me, but that is my umbrella you have. Second Stranger—I don't doubt it. Just wait till I call a policeman. First Stranger—What for? Second Stranger—Burglars broke into my house the other night and left this umbrella.—Exchange.

Oil Magnate—Ah, my boy, a millionaire's position is a hard one. Skeptical Friend—As to how? Oil Magnate—If I heard my wealth, they say I'm a skindint, and if I try to give money away they say I am trying to ease my guilty conscience.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Wife (angrily)—Well, there's no use in arguing the matter any longer. When I set my foot down, that covers the entire ground. Husband (calmly)—I wouldn't make it quite that strong, my dear, but your foot certainly does cover a good deal of ground.—Exchange.

Disgusted Wife—Say, niggah, eber sense Ah married yo' yo's don nuffin 'cept sit round de house. Doan yo' eber feel any ambition? Lazy Husband—Ah feels ambition w'en Ah's sittin' round yah, honey, but jes' 's soon 's Ah stahs ter wo'k Ah gits discouraged.—Judge.

The family were discussing the coming wedding of the only daughter. "Of course," said the bride to be to her father, "you will give me away?" "I'm afraid I have done it already, my dear," he replied. "I told George only this morning that you had a disposition just like your mother's."

The elevated railroad guard resigned his position as an usher at the church. "It mixed me all up," he said. "When I was showing people into the pews on Sunday morning I'd tell 'em to step lively, and one or twice I started to take up a collection in the smoking car."—Chicago Tribune.

On coming home from church on Sunday Archie's mother asked him how he liked it, and Archie said it was fine. "What do you like most in the church?" asked his mother. "Well, the best part is where they pass around the money," and, turning to his father, said: "How much did you get? I got a dime."

Arboreal.

"So your son-in-law has a family tree?" "Yes," answered Mr. Cumrox, "but I'm kind o' suspicious that some of us American citizens aren't going about the work of preserving the forests the right way."—Washington Star.