

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

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

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

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

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

"Get run down?"

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

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

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

"There's many a way that it's done, sir," the mate added. "There's loadin' a cranky vessel w' grain in bulk without usin' partition boards. If you get a little water in, as you are bound to do with a ship of that kind, the grain will swell and swell until it bursts the seams open, and down ye go. Then there's ignition of coal gas aboard of steamers. That's a safe game, for nobody can deny it. And there are accidents to propellers. If the shaft of a propeller breaks in heavy weather it's a bad lookout. I've known ships leave the docks with their propellers half-sawn through all round. There's no end of the tricks of the trade."

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

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

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

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

"But there are government inspectors?"

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

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

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

"To be married?"

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

"Who's the girl?" Miggs asked, with fagold interest.

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

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

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

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

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

"If it is true there is villainy in it," cried Tom, with wild eyes. "The blackest villainy that ever was done upon earth. I'll go—I'll see him to-night. I shall know the truth!" He rushed furiously downstairs and through the bar. There was a cab near the door. "Drive into London!" he cried. "69 Eccleston square. I am on fire to be there!" The cabman

sprang on the box, and they rattled away as fast as the horse would go. Long before reaching No. 69 he had opened the door and was standing upon the step. The instant that the cab pulled up he sprang off, and rang loudly at the great brass bell which flanked the heavy door.

"Is Mr. Girdlestone in?" he asked, as a maid appeared at the door.

"No, sir."

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

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

"Gone away?"

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

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

"They are not coming back."

"Impossible!" Tom cried in despair.

"What is their address then?"

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

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

CHAPTER XIII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"She didn't make a fuss?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Nothing more?"

"No."

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

"Want me to go?"

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

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

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

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

"Oh, yes, you shall. I'll be down from Saturday to Monday every week, and perhaps oftener. If business goes well I may come down and stay for some time. Whether I do or not may depend upon you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I will go."

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

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

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

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

(To be continued.)

No Flattery Necessary.

"You needn't begin jolly me," said the gruff man to the man who had land to sell. "I'm not a man that can be affected by flattery. When I—"

"That's just what I said to my boss," interrupted the agent. "I told him, when he suggested your name to me, that it was a relief to call on a man who did not expect to be praised and flattered to his face all the time. I tell you, Mr. Grump, this city has mighty few men such as you. Nine men out of ten are simply dying to have some one tell them how great they are, but you are above such weakness. Any one can see that at a glance. I'm glad of it. It's helpful to me to meet a man who rises superior to the petty tactics of the average solicitor. It's a real and lasting benefit, and an instructive experience."

Ten minutes later, after a few more such comments on the part of the agent, the man who could not be flattered into signing the contract was asking which line his name should be written upon.—Success Magazine.

Best He Could Do.

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

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

Hard to Open.

"Rich, isn't he?"

"Fabulously."

"Where did he get it?"

"He's the man who applied the car-window principle to doors of safes and safety deposit vaults, making them absolutely burglar proof."—Houston Post.

Pa's Experience.

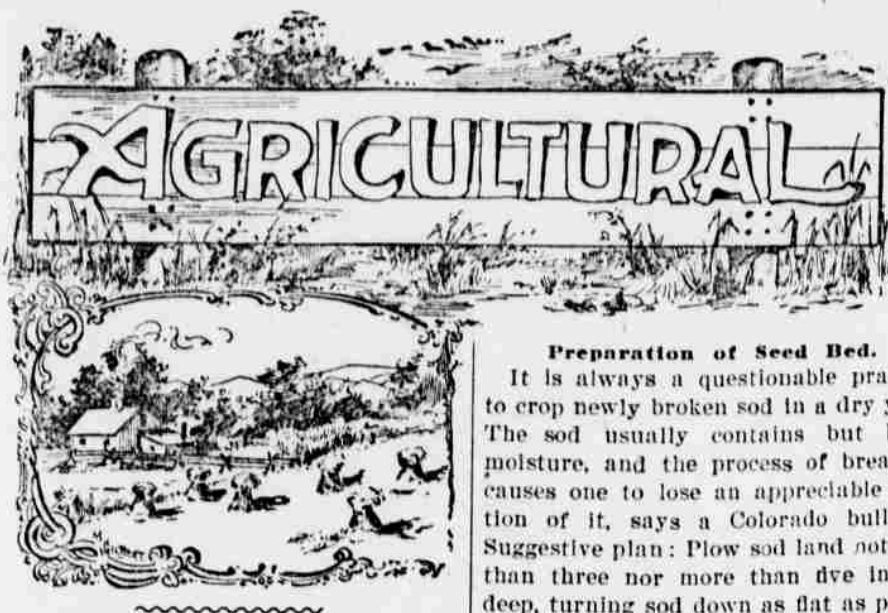
Little Willie—Say, pa, what is a scheme?

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

Quick Returns.

Tomson—Was Dr. Puff's treatment of your rich uncle satisfactory?

Johnson—Quite so. I came into the fortune recently.



Improving the Farm Home.

While most farm homes are lacking in the conveniences that make for comfort, it is possible for them to have many of these conveniences at a small cost. Ofttimes the man of the house does not consider how very inconvenient the woman has it, so cannot see the necessity of putting in improvements in the house, while with his own work he is fully alive to the value of labor-saving devices.

How many steps the housewife must take in her daily tasks that might be saved with a little rearranging of the kitchen and other rooms of the house! For instance, the cistern or well is usually located at some distance from the house and the woman is the one who usually has to carry the water. At a small cost a pump can be placed in the kitchen, so that with the same amount of pumping she can get the water without walking for it. Then, too, a sink conveniently located in the kitchen is a convenience often lacking in the farm house.

It is now possible to arrange a water supply in the house at a comparatively small cost, so that running water, both hot and cold, can be had in any part of the house. This makes it possible to put in a bathroom—a luxury that has almost become a necessity with the city householder.

To save the wife's steps and her strength is to save her health. Stop and think how many miles the housewife in the ordinary farm home must walk in preparing the three meals a day. In all justice the march of agricultural improvements should not overlook the welfare of the farmer's better half. A little rearranging and improving will easily make things more convenient and add comfort and happiness for all concerned.—Goodall's Farmer.

A Clip for the Lines.

Many driving accidents are the result of the lines getting under the horse's tail in such a manner that the driver is unable to dislodge them, and in his efforts to do so control of the animal is lost. In some instances this matter is provided for by a guard built on the carriage or wagon which effectually maintains the lines at a point above the horse out of reach of his tail.

A woman is the designer and patentee of an invention of the nature of an attachment to the harness which accomplishes this object as well as the guard on the vehicle, and is not nearly so obtrusive. It is made of metal and of such a shape as to be readily secured to that part of the harness immediately over the horse's haunches. A pair of upturned clips hold the lines in a position where it is impossible for the horse to flirt his tail over them.

Cattle and Hide Exports.

According to a British authority, which contains some tables on the subject, the United States has a larger number of hogs in proportion to its population than Australia, New Zealand, Canada or Argentina, but the number of beef cattle to the thousand of population is smallest in the United States. Hides, however, have been declining in price in this country.

Under the present revenue law goatskins, calfskins, kips, horse hides and other raw material for tanning come in free of duty, but there is a tax of 15 per cent on hides of adult beef cattle. Notwithstanding this fact the exports of shoes have increased from 493,027 pairs, valued at \$590,574 in 1893, to 6,326,527 pairs, valued at \$11,658,323, in 1907.

Better than Scarecrows.

According to recent experiments by Stanislas Tetard, a widely known French agriculturist, wheat and other cereals can be protected against the ravages of crows, which are particularly fond of the grain when its sprouts are just pushing above the ground, by treating the seeds before they are sown with a mixture of coal tar, petroleum and phenic acid. This treatment, which delays the growth of the seed for a day or two, but causes no damage, imparts an odor which is insufferable to the crows, but which disappears after the sprouts have attained a larger growth, when they are no longer subject to attack.

Remedy for Brittle Hoofs.

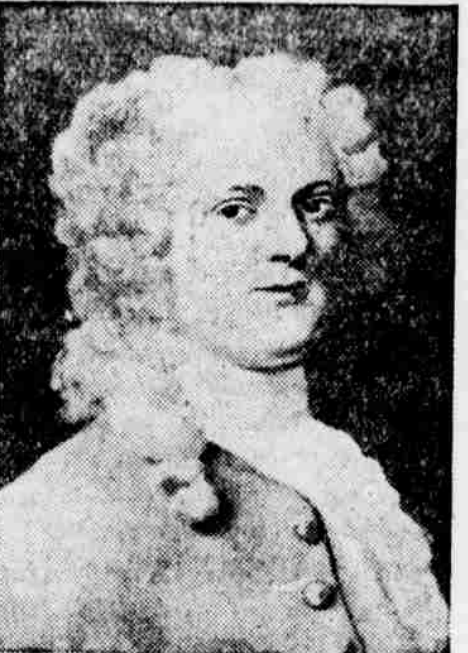
For brittle hoofs in a horse—even when so brittle that they will not hold a shoe—the following is reported as an excellent remedy: Two parts of tar with one part balsam of fir, mixed and applied every other night to the extreme top of hoof. One who has tried it says that in six weeks he cured completely a case as above.

PHILADELPHIA TO CELEBRATE

City to Observe the 225th Anniversary of Its Founding.

Events dear to the nation as to the city where they took place are to be reproduced in the big celebration which will mark the two hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Philadelphia. "The Cradle of Liberty," the capital of the nation in the days when the founders were paving the way for the birth of the republic, is preparing for an unprecedented series of pageants during the week of Oct. 4. The kind of demonstration that is planned will call for historical research in order to gather data to bring to life again the men, the manners and the happenings of more than two centuries ago. In the churches where the heroes of the Revolution worshipped, in the very buildings, and at the same desks where they sat to produce the two greatest documents in the history of the New World—the Declaration and the Constitution—their successors in public life will gather to recite the achievements of the nation's makers. Further back, indeed, than the Revolutionary period will go the exercises. William Penn once more will land and meet in conclave the aboriginal owners of the land, and the famous treaty will be signed again near the monument that marks the site of the old elm tree. In the pageants, the pictures of the early life of the State will be carried back to a period antedating by sixty years the coming of Penn.

William Penn, the founder of the State



WILLIAM PENN.

of Pennsylvania, died in Ruscomb, in Berkshire, having spent all his later years in England. He was buried in the simple burial ground attached to the Quaker meeting house at Jordans, where many members of his family also lie—both his wives, his first wife, Gulelma Maria, in one grave, and his second wife, Hannah, with him in another—and many of his children. Nothing is more remarkable than the entire simplicity of the tombstone which commemorates the founder of Pennsylvania. It is not more than two feet high and is of the simplest limestone, well worn. Projects have been mooted to remove the ashes of Penn from this simple environment to a more costly sarcophagus in Philadelphia, where Penn is commemorated by a handsome monument.

A Philanthropist.

An earnest worker among the poor of New York says, according to a writer in Harper's Magazine, that not long ago an old gentleman, who has the reputation of being something of a philanthropist, asked if he could not accompany her on one of her rounds of visits. Much pleased at his interest, the worker consented. The destitute condition of many families elicited expressions of deep sympathy from the old gentleman, but to his companion's surprise and regret, nothing more material. Presently they came upon a small girl weeping bitterly.

"What is it, my dear?" the old gentleman inquired.

The child raised a tear-stained face and pointed into a dark alleyway. "Me mudder sent me to buy some bread, an' I lost my dime in dere, an' I'll get licked awful!" she sobbed.

"Poor dear!" he remarked in a tender voice, at the same time putting his hand into his waistcoat pocket. "Don't cry. Here is a match; perhaps you will be able to find it."

In Another Voice.

As the pastor of the Zion's Hill Church looked down at his parishioners, to whom he had been giving thirty-five minutes of sound doctrine, his face took on a less benignant expression.

"Bredren an' sisters," he said, "I want to warn you against one thing, an' dat is 'linkin' ebery man dat don't hab jes' de same views you got dis a no-'count religionist."

"I don't want to hear so much talk about 'wolves in sheep's clothing' as I been hearing. You don't want to settle it in yo' minds dat a man's a wolf in sheep's clothing jes' because he don't bl'at exactly like you do."

Making Faces.

Saucee—I saw a man in a window making faces to-day.

Simple—What was he doing that for?

Saucee—For a couple of clocks. He is a jeweler.—London Fun.

A widower uses his children as an excuse for marrying again, the same as he does for going to the circus.

No man can think well of himself who does not think well of others.