

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued.)

This last appeal of Kate's was in answer to an expression of incredulity and doubt which had passed over the face of the lady below. It was successful in its object, for the ring of truth with which she spoke and the look of anxiety and terror upon her face were too genuine to be mistaken. The lady drew her rein so as to bring the carriage as near the walls as was possible without losing sight of Kate's face.

"My dear," she said, "you may safely tell me everything. Whatever I can do to help you shall be done, and where I am powerless there are others who are my friends and may be of assistance. Scully is my name—Mrs. Lavinia Scully of London. Don't cry, my poor girl, but tell me all about it, and let us see how we can put matters right."

These encouraging words wiped away the tears which had been brought to her eyes by the unwelcome sound of a friendly voice. Leaning forward as far as she could, and preventing herself from falling by passing her arm round a great branch which shot across the top of the shed, she gave in as few words as she could a detailed account of all that had befallen her. She described her guardian's anxiety that she should marry his son, her refusal, their sudden departure from London, her life at the Priory, the manner in which she was cut off from all human aid, and the reasons which made her believe that an attempt would be made upon her life. In conclusion, she narrated the scene which had occurred that very morning, when her guardian had tempted her to commit suicide. The only incident which she omitted from her story was that which had occurred the night before, for she felt that it might put too severe a tax upon Mrs. Scully's credulity. Indeed, looking back at it she almost persuaded herself that the sight which she had seen might be some phantom conjured up by her own imagination, weakened as she was in mind and in body.

Having concluded her narrative, she wound up by imploring her new-found friend to assist her by letting her friends in London know what had become of her and where she was. Mrs. Scully listened with a face which expressed alternately the most profound pity and the most burning indignation. When Kate had finished she sat silent for a minute or more entirely absorbed in her own thoughts. She switched her whip up and down viciously, and her usually placid countenance assumed an expression so fierce that Kate, looking down at her, feared that she had given her offense. When she looked up at last, however, she smiled so pleasantly that the poor girl was reassured, and felt instinctively that she had really found a true and effective friend at last.

"We must act promptly," she said, "for we don't know what they may be about, or what their plans are for the future. Who did you say your friends were?"

"Dr. Dimsdale, of Phillimore Gardens, Kensington."

"Hasn't he got a grown-up son?"

"Yes," said Kate, with a slight flush on her pale cheeks.

"Ah," cried the good lady, with a very roguish smile, "I see how the land lies. Of course, of course, why shouldn't it? I remember hearing about that young man. I have heard about the Girdlestons also. African merchants they were in the city. You see I know all about you."

"You know Tom?" Kate cried in astonishment.

"Oh, don't let us get talking of Tom," said Mrs. Scully, good-humoredly. "When girls get on a subject of that sort there's an end to everything. What I want to know is business. In the first place, I shall drive down to Bedsforth and I shall send to London. But not to Phillimore Gardens. Hot-headed young men do foolish things under such circumstances as these. This is a case that wants careful management. I know a gentleman in London who is just the man, and who I know would be only too proud to help a lady in distress. He is a retired officer, and his name is Major Clutterbuck—Major Tobias Clutterbuck."

"Oh, I know him very well, and I have heard of you, too," said Kate with a smile. "I remember your name now in connection with his."

"It was Mrs. Scully's turn to blush now. "Never mind that," she said. "I can trust the major, and I know he will be down here at a word from me. I shall let him have the facts, and he can tell the Dimsdales if he thinks it best. Good-by, dear, don't be unhappy any more, but remember that you have friends outside who will very quickly set all right. Good-by!" and waving her hand in encouragement, the good widow woke up the pony, which had fallen fast asleep, and rattled away down the lane in the direction from which she had come.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At four o'clock Mr. Girdlestone stepped into the Bedsforth telegraph office and wired his short message. It ran thus: "Case hopeless. Come on to-morrow with a doctor." On receipt of this he knew by their agreement that his son would come down. There was nothing for it now but that his ward should die. If he delayed longer the crash might come before her money was available, and then how vain all regrets would be.

It seemed to him that there was very little risk in the matter. The girl had had no communication with any one. Even of those around her Mrs. Jorrocks was in her dotage, Rebecca Taylorforth was stanch and true, and Stevens knew nothing. Every one on the country side had heard of the invalid young lady at the Priory. Who would be surprised to hear that she had

passed away? He dare not call in any local medical man, but his inventive brain had overcome the difficulty, and had hit upon a device by which he might defy both doctors and coroner. If all went as he had planned it, it was difficult to see any chance of detection. In the case of a poorer man the fact that the girl's money reverted to him might arouse suspicion, but he rightly argued that with his great reputation no one would ever dream that such a consideration could have weight with him.

Having sent the telegram off and so taken a final step, John Girdlestone felt more at his ease. He was proud of his own energy and decision. As he walked very pompously and gravely down the village street his heart glowed within him at the thought of the long struggle which he had maintained against misfortune. He passed over in his mind all the successive borrowings and speculations and makeshifts and ruses which the firm had resorted to.

Yet in spite of every danger and difficulty it still held up its head with the best, and would weather the storm at last. He reflected proudly that there was no other man in the city who would have had the dogged tenacity and the grim resolution which he had displayed during the last twelve months. "If ever any one should put it all in a book," he said to himself, "there are few who would believe it possible. It is not by my own strength that I have done it."

When he was half way to the Priory he met a small pony carriage which was rattling towards Bedsforth at a great pace, driven by a good-looking middle-aged lady with a small page by her side. The merchant encountered this equipage in a narrow country lane without a footpath, and as it approached him he could not help observing that the lady wore an indignant and gloomy look upon her features which was out of keeping with their general contour. Her forehead was contracted into a very decided frown, and her lips were gathered into what might be described as a negative smile. Girdlestone stood aside to let her pass, but the lady by a sudden twitch of her right hand brought the wheels across in so sudden a manner that they were within an ace of going over his toes. He only saved himself by springing back into a gap of the hedge. As it was, he found on looking down that his pearl-grey trousers were covered with flakes of wet mud. What made the incident more perplexing was that both the middle-aged lady and the page laughed very heartily as they rattled away to the village. The merchant proceeded on his way musing in his heart at the uncharitableness and innate wickedness of unregenerated human nature.

Good Mrs. Scully little dreamed of the urgency of the case. Had she seen the telegram which John Girdlestone had just dispatched, it is conceivable that she might have read between the words, and by acting more promptly have prevented a terrible crime. As a matter of fact, with all her sympathy the worthy woman had taken a large part of Kate's story with the proverbial grain of salt. It seemed to her to be incredible and impossible that in this nineteenth century such a thing as deliberate and carefully planned murder should occur in Christian England. That these things occur in the abstract we are ready to admit, but we find it very difficult to realize that they may come within the horizon of our own experience. Hence Mrs. Scully set no importance upon Kate's fears for her life, and put them down to the excited state of the girl's imagination. She did consider it, however, to be a very iniquitous and unjustifiable thing that a young girl should be cooped up and separated from all the world in such a very dreary place of seclusion as the Priory. This consideration and nothing more serious had set that look of wrath upon her pleasant face, and had stirred her up to frustrate Girdlestone and to communicate with Kate's friends.

Her intention had been to telegraph to London, but as she drove to Bedsforth she felt for her within the limits of a telegram to explain to her satisfaction all that she wanted to express. A letter, she reflected, would if posted now, reach the major by the first post on Saturday morning. It would simply mean a few hours' delay in the taking of steps to relieve Kate, and what difference could a few hours more or less make to the girl? She determined, therefore, that she would write to the major, explaining all the circumstances and leave it to him what course of action should be pursued.

Mrs. Scully was well known at the post-office, and they quickly accommodated her with the requisites for correspondence. Within a quarter of an hour she had written, sealed, stamped and posted the following epistle:

"Dearest Toby—Who do you think I have come across down here? No less a person than that Miss Harston who was Girdlestone's ward. You used to talk about her, I remember, and indeed you were a great admirer of hers. You would be surprised if you saw her now, so thin and worn and pale. Still her face is very sweet and pretty, so I won't deny your good taste—how could I after you have paid your guardian has brought her down here and has locked her up in a great bleak house called the Priory. She has no one to speak to, and is not allowed to write letters. She seemed to be heart-broken because none of her friends knew where she is, and she fears that they may imagine that she has willingly deserted them. Of course, by her friends she means that curly-headed Mr. Dimsdale that you spoke of. The poor girl is in a very low, nervous state, and told me over the wall of the park that she feared her guardian had designs on her life. I can hardly believe that, but I do think that she is far from well, and that it is enough to drive her mad to coop her up like that. We must get her out somehow or another. I suppose that her guardian is within his rights, and that it is not a police matter. You must consider what must be done, and let young Dimsdale know if you think best. He will want to come down to see her, no doubt, and if Toby were to come, too, I should not be sorry."

"I should have telegraphed about it, but I could not explain myself sufficiently. I assure you that the poor girl is in a very bad way, and we can't be too energetic in what we do. It was very sad to hear the positive manner in which she declared that her guardian would murder her, though she did not attempt to give any reason why he should commit such a terrible crime. We saw a horrid one-eyed

man at the gate who appeared to be on guard to prevent any one from coming out or in. On our way to Bedsforth we met no less a person than the great Mr. Girdlestone himself, and we actually drove so clumsily that we splashed him all over with mud. Wasn't that a very sad and unaccountable thing? I fancy I see Toby smiling over that. Ever yours,

"LAVINIA SCULLY."

The major called a cab and rattled away to Phillimore Gardens and thence to the office, without being able to find the man of whom he was in search. He then rushed down the Strand as quickly as he could, intending to catch the next train and go alone, but on his way to Waterloo station he fell in with Tom Dimsdale, as recorded in a preceding chapter.

The letter was a thunderbolt to Tom. In his worst dreams he had never imagined anything so dark as this. He hurried back to the station at such a pace that the poor major was reduced to a most asthmatical and wheezy condition. He trotted along pluckily, however, and as he went heard the account of Tom's adventures in the morning, and of the departure of Ezra Girdlestone and of his red-headed companion. The major's face grew more anxious still when he heard of it. "Pray heaven we may not be too late!" he panted.

CHAPTER XIX.

When Kate had made a clean breast of all her troubles to the Widow Scully, and had secured that good woman's co-operation, a great weight seemed to have been lifted from her heart, and she sprang from the shed a different woman. It would soon be like a dream, all these dreary weeks in the grim old house. Within a day she was sure that either Tom or the major would find means of communicating with her. The thought made her so happy that the color stole back into her cheeks, and she sang for very lightness of heart as she made her way back to the Priory.

Mrs. Jorrocks and Rebecca observed the change which had come over her, and marveled at it. Kate attempted to aid the former in her household work, but the old one refused her assistance, and repulsed her harshly. Her maid, too, answered her very unkindly when she addressed her, and eyed her in anything but a friendly manner.

She amused herself that morning by reckoning up in her mind what the sequence of events would be in London, and how long it would be before she heard from her friends. If Mrs. Scully had telegraphed, news would have reached her last night. Probably she would write as well, giving all the particulars about her. The post came in about nine o'clock, she thought. Then some time would elapse before the major could find Tom. After that, no doubt they would have to consider what had best be done, and perhaps would go and consult with Dr. Dimsdale. That would occupy the morning and part of the afternoon. They could hardly reach the Priory before daylight.

Ezra would be down by that time. On the Saturday before he had arrived before five and six. A great dread filled her soul at the thought of meeting the young merchant again. It was merely the natural instinct of a lady shrinking from whatever is rough and coarse and antagonistic. She had no conception of the impending danger, or of what his coming might mean to her.

Mr. Girdlestone was more gracious to her than usual that morning at breakfast. He seemed anxious to efface the remembrance of his fierce and threatening words the day before. Rebecca, who waited upon them, was astonished to hear the way in which he spoke. His whole manner was less heavy and ungainly than usual, for now that the time of action was at hand he felt braced and invigorated, as energetic men do.

"You should study botany while you are down here," he said blandly. "Depend upon it, one cannot learn too many things in one's youth. Besides a knowledge of natural science teaches us the marvelous harmony which prevails throughout the universe, and so enlarges our mind."

"I should very much like to know something of it," answered Kate. "My only fear is that I should not be clever enough to learn it."

"The wood here is full of wonders. The tiniest mushroom is as extraordinary and as worthy of study as the largest oak. Your father was fond of plants and animals."

"Yes, I can remember that," said Kate, her face glowing as she had never traveled back to years gone by. What would that same father have thought, she wondered, had he known how this man opposite to her had treated her? What did it matter now though, when she would so soon be out of his power?

(To be continued.)

Her Right to Preach.

Woman's inborn right to preach has been recognized by Bishop Talbot, of Pennsylvania. A skirted itinerant expounder of the gospel used to gather a crowd every Sunday within sight of the bishop's cathedral and many of his flock were seen lingering under her spell. One of the vestrymen went to the bishop to renegestrate. He wanted something done to stop the preaching so near the cathedral. "Oh, never mind," said the bishop, "she cannot hurt me. Let her preach. She must exhort somebody, and you see, she has no husband. I warrant your wife gives you many a good sermon in the retirement of your home. All women like to preach."—Cleveland Leader.

Not a Crank.

He—I notice you call a good many of your acquaintances cranks. I hope you do not consider me a crank? She—Certainly not! A crank is a person with one idea, and I never heard anybody accuse you of having one!—Pearson's Weekly.

"They say Mrs. Youngwood across the way has the most extraordinary powers of persuasion."

"Yes, I've known her to keep a girl a week at a time."—Baltimore American.

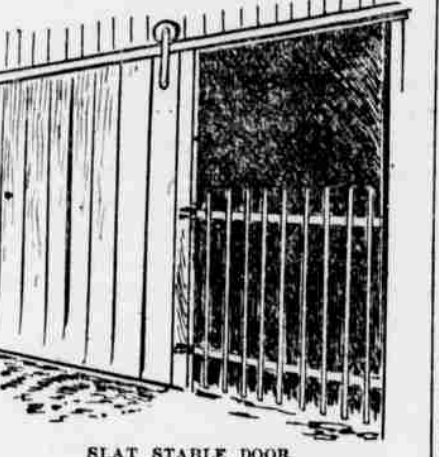
A government commission is struggling with the problem of exterminating the nun butterfly, which has become a plague in Bohemia.



A Gate for the Barn Doorway.

When the horse stable opens into the buggy room and it is necessary to keep the door open for ventilation, I find that a small gate constructed of light material is an excellent protection against horses getting loose and injuring the buggies. The cut here-with shows a light gate we have in use in our horse barn. It is very simple in construction, but serves a very important purpose. Were it not for this light gate we would find it necessary to keep the door closed between the horse stable and buggy room, thus shutting off ventilation.

The gate is hinged onto the rolling door with light strap hinges, explains a writer in the Prairie Farmer, so that when the gate is not in use it swings



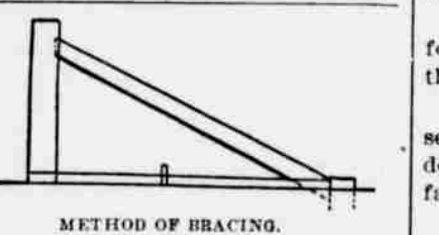
around and fastens to the large door out of the way. For material in making the gate we use inch strips of good pine for the horizontal pieces. The upright pieces are light strips gotten out for fence pickets. I find a light gate of this character a good thing to keep poultry out of the barn during the summer months.

The Colony Plan.

If you want vigorous chickens and hens that lay do not overcrowd them. Forty or fifty in one flock are sufficient. If you have more than this number by all means make a change, for your chickens are probably costing you more than they are worth. If you do not care to sell any of your birds then start into the chicken business on the colony plan. Divide your flock into colonies of about forty fowls each and build houses for them in different parts of the farm. For instance, if you have one hen house on the east side of the barn, put another house on the west side. Then if you have enough birds put another house down by the calf lot and another to the farther end of the barn yard. A dozen different places will suggest themselves if you look for locations on your farm. If you have made a failure in raising chickens or your hens "don't amount to much," try this method. It will surprise and please you. Your hens will be healthier, will lay better and will require less feed. The reason for this will be easily seen when you have once tried it. Chickens, or anything else for that matter, cannot stand crowding. Also the colony plan gives the fowls wider range and encourages the birds to hunt for their living.—Exchange.

Bracing Corner Posts.

This method, while cheaply devised, is used very effectively in bracing corner posts. Use as a brace a pole nine or ten feet long, four or five inches in diameter and square at both ends. Fit one end of pole to the post half way between its middle and top and place other end of brace on a flat stone. Secure one end of a wire around bottom of post, then take it to outer end of brace and back to post again, fastening securely. With a short stout stick twist wires together until very tight



and your brace is complete, says Farmers' Review. This brace comes in line with your fence and by fastening your wire or boards to it prevents it from slipping sideways.

Hogs for Cuba and Mexico.

Some of the coast country farmers while visiting Galveston saw that many hogs from distant points in Texas and Oklahoma were being shipped to Cuba and Mexico and returned home impressed with the idea that if it paid the North Texas and Oklahoma farmers to raise hogs for the Cuban and Mexican markets, it would pay the coast country farmers to do the same thing.—Galveston News.

If You Doubt It, Try It.

A man once backed himself for a large amount, which he subsequently lost, to move an ordinary brick attached to two miles of cord along a level road outside Chichester. He failed to move the brick, and it may be roughly estimated that the friction of the cord on the road increased the weight of the brick (about seven pounds) and cord to a dead weight of not far short of a ton.—Fry's Magazine.

What Beef Men Think of Silage.

The success attending the use of silage in the dairy business has created much interest among beef cattle men. Silage furnishes a succulent food, which is quite essential to the dairy sow in keeping her digestive system in good condition. The same will be found true for the beef animal. Twenty pounds of silage per day will supply all the bulk and water needed in a fattening ration. The other roughage may consist of either long fodder or mixed hay. The economy of using silage for fattening purposes is well brought out by Prof. A. M. Soule of the Virginia station, who has stated the following conclusions:

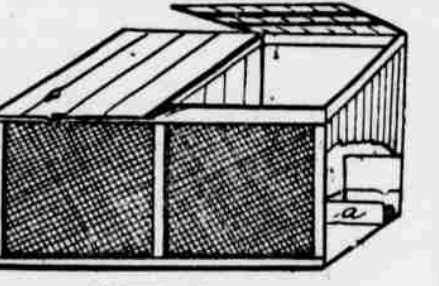
"There was a difference of from .3 to .5 of a pound of grain per head per day in favor of the silage-fed cattle. They also finished out better and in any discriminating market would certainly bring a better price than the dry-fed cattle."

"Of the three forms of roughage fed, the silage was eaten with the greatest relish, and there was absolutely no loss, whereas with the stover the loss amounted to 13.5 per cent and with hay 4.16 per cent. Where a large number of animals are fed this would make a considerable difference in the cost of ration, except that the shredded stover can be utilized to advantage for bedding."

Silage as it is put up to-day is better than when the practice was first started. Good silage of corn is made when the grain has passed the milk stage and has commenced to glaze a little. Silage is made also from sorghum, corn and cowpeas and pea vines.

Double Brooding Coop.

The double brooding coop shown in the drawing is four feet square and three feet high at rear, two and one-half in front. It may be built of tongue and grooved stuff or straight-edge boards one-half or three-fourths inch thick. The hinged lids should have two cleats each to make them firm. In front is a one-inch mesh wire netting and at the edges are strips of three-quarter by one and one-half-inch stuff, to insure rigidity. In one corner, as shown, is the nest, four inches deep and fifteen or eighteen inches square, according to the size of the hens kept. The board floor, explains the Orange



DOUBLE BROOD COOP.

Judd Farmer, is covered with sawdust or sand. Food and drink are more readily supplied through the door, which preferably lifts in front, as shown.

Corn Leading Western Crop.

The statistical bureau of the Union Pacific passenger department issues a statement compiled from government reports showing the value of farm products in seventeen States west of the Mississippi in 1907 to have been \$1,091,000,000. Corn leads in production, being valued at nearly half a billion dollars. Winter wheat is next, valued at \$200,000,000, and domestic hay was valued at only \$2,000,000 less. Rye, oats, barley and potatoes follow in order. The report also shows an increase in live stock of 250 per cent since 1870.

Color of Eggs.

There is no difference in the color of the yolk of the eggs laid by different breeds, nor individually. But the color of the shell is a matter of breed and mating, and the color of the yolk is governed by the food given. The average length of a hen's egg is 2.27 inches; diameter at the broad end, 1.72 inches; weight, about one-eighth of a pound.

Farm Notes.

Alfalfa seed is now selling in many parts of the West for 10 to 12 cents a pound.

Egyptian cotton land produces nearly four times as much per acre as that of this country.

In four years a pair of rabbits could secure a progeny of nearly 1,500,000. A doe rabbit produces as many as seven families a year.

Many important drainage projects are under way in the marsh land in Louisiana, which will ultimately make it a great agricultural country.

A dairy train which recently went out from Lafayette, Ind., covered 500 miles on the Monon route, and 4,000 people heard the lectures which were delivered from the cars.

The Sacramento Valley, in California, shipped over \$3,000,000 worth of oranges last year, and the growers of that section estimate that the new crop will be worth \$1,000,000 more.

It is estimated that if the cattle shippers of Iowa succeed in establishing their claims against the railroads for excessive shipping charges in Chicago they will get back fully a half-million dollars.

Great Britain now imports every year about 9,000,000 bushels of apples, one-half of which come from the United States. Canada sends over about 3,000,000 bushels and Australia nearly all the rest.

An effort is being made to establish in the Ozark region of Missouri an extensive breeding station for farm animals. The project has the approval of Secretary Wilson and Dr. Melvin, of the Bureau of Animal Industry.

DAIRYING IN DENMARK.

Land Worked for Hundreds of Years Still Beats Ours.

That American farmers and promoters of agricultural industries are rather lax in grasping their opportunities, and are in danger of being outgeneraled in the markets of the world, unless they improve their methods, is the belief of Dean James E. Russell, of Columbia University, New York. Dean Russell was recently a visitor at the state college, and during his stay there addressed an assembly of the teachers of the Inland Empire, who were attending the teachers' institute in Pullman. Relative to the problems just mentioned, he said:

"Thirty years ago New York was sending butter and cheese to the London markets. New York butter and cheese were ruling out similar products from Ontario, and other parts of the world. Just thirty years ago Denmark began to think she could make butter and put it in the London market. The question was, How could she overcome the lead that New York already had in the London markets? She sent men to London to study out the ground; to find what London wanted. Then she set about to give them the required product."

"Denmark is a country of poor soil, which has been tilled and overworked for a thousand years. Nevertheless, the Danish population annually sells in the markets of London \$35,000,000 worth of butter. In 1903 the entire United States exported only \$1,064,000 worth of butter. In addition to the vast quantity of butter mentioned, Denmark sends out one-fifth as much pork as we do, and just as many horses; and certainly, we should lead the world in the breeding of horses. In the meantime the Danish nation has taught the huns how to work. Four hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of eggs were exported by this country in 1875, and in 1903 this export had reached a value of \$8,092,000. In the last ten years Denmark has taken \$8,000,000 worth of corn from Iowa and Nebraska, via New York, which she has fed to Danish cows and pigs, and then placed the latter in the European markets in successful competition with similar products from America."

"I said a moment ago that twenty years ago the competitor of Denmark was the State of New York. In these twenty years the Danish people have increased their exports from \$1,000,000 to \$40,000,000. In the same twenty years farm values in the State of New York have decreased \$200,000,000. In the last fifteen years Ontario has outbid New York in the same way in the cheese market. Twenty years ago New York companies received Canadian cheese and put the New York stamp on it to get one cent more in the English market. Today the New York farmers are sending their cheese over the Canadian boundaries, and paying two cents per pound in order to sell it at all."

Showing the superiority of European methods of education in comparison with American education, Dean Russell said:

"Wurtemberg is a small German state, a little larger than the Inland Empire of Eastern Washington, and having a population of about two million persons. Thirty years ago Wurtemberg began to realize that her population was beginning to dwindle; that something had to be done to maintain her integrity as a state. So she set about building up a system of schools for all the people; that would help the boy who wished to be a carpenter, a plumber, or a farmer, in the same degree, according to his needs, as they would assist the youth who desired to be a lawyer, an engineer, or a physician. Today Wurtemberg has a university giving courses of world-wide fame; technical schools, weaving and manufacturing schools; two hundred and thirty industrial schools in towns and villages; schools for metal workers and workers in the textile trades; schools of art, of agriculture, of preparation for household management; and numerous farm schools, and high schools throughout the state."

"Wurtemberg is a state but little larger than the Inland Empire of Eastern Washington, supports all these institutions, with an income of ten dollars per head of population. What would American citizens think, if in addition to supporting agricultural colleges, they were asked to support five hundred technical and industrial schools for every two million of population? This is what is being done in the small state of Wurtemberg; and from the point of view of American citizens today, it is almost inconceivable; the contemplation of which must lead any American citizen to infer that his country has much to do and learn before it can successfully compete with the old country in the products of industrial education."

Answers to Queries.

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

Haverford, Pa.—"Is it considered that hog raising is practicable in the northwestern part of the United States?" H. W.

"It is probable that there is no place in the United States where the prices for pork products average as high as in the Pacific Northwest. A condition of significance, too, is that the people of this region are not sufficiently alive to the necessity of their meeting the demand for pork products. Those who are in the business are making money. Conditions are improving, however, for at the present time we note a growing tendency among farmers to pay more attention to this business. The Berkshire breed is preferable, in my opinion, although the Duroc Jerseys are making some headway. At the experiment station we have about concluded that a cross of these two breeds would be better than either one by itself."

Eventually.

Reporter—Do you ever contribute anything to foreign papers?

Comic Bard—Why—er—yes; on looking over the miscellany columns of the papers I find that I contribute lots of stuff to the London Tit-Bits.

Sans Everything.

Prosperous Clubman—When I first arrived in this town, forty years ago, I hadn't a shirt to my back.

Old Clubman—Worse than that; you hadn't a tooth in your head.