

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

"Of course. What could be more delightfully simple? Friend Burt here does his work; we carry her through the garden gate, and lay her on the darkest part of the rails. Then we miss her at the house. There is an alarm and a search. The gate is found open. We naturally go through with lanterns, and find her on the line. I don't think we need fear the owner, or any one else, then?"

"He's a sharp 'un, is the guv'nor," cried Burt, slapping his thigh enthusiastically. "It's the downiest lay I have heard this many a day."

"Mr. Burt can do his part of the business out of doors. We can entice her out upon some excuse. There is no reason why any one should have a suspicion of the truth."

"But they know that she is not mad." "They will think that she did it on purpose. The secret will be looked up in our three breasts. After one night's work our friend here goes to the colonies as a prosperous man, and the firm of Girdlestone holds up its head once more, stainless and irreproachable."

"Speak low!" said Ezra, in a whisper. "I hear her coming downstairs." They listened to her light springy footstep as it passed the door. "Come here, Burt," he said, after a pause. "She is at work on the lawn. Come and have a look at her."

"They all went over to the window and looked out. It was then that Kate, glancing up, saw the three cruel faces surveying her."

"She's a rare, well-built 'un," said Burt, as he stepped back from the window. "It is the ugliest job as ever I was on."

"But we can rely upon you?" Girdlestone asked, looking at him with puckered eyes.

"You bet—as long as you pay me," the navvy answered phlegmatically.

CHAPTER XXI.

The grey winter evening was beginning to steal in before the details had all been arranged by the conspirators. It had grown so chill that Kate had abandoned her attempt at gardening, and had gone back to her room. Ezra left his father and Burt by the fire and came out to the open hall door. The grim old trees looked gaunt and eerie as they waved their naked arms about in the cutting wind. A slight fog had come up from the sea and lay in light wreaths over the upper branches like a thin veil of gauze. Ezra was shivering as he surveyed the dreary scene, felt a hand on his arm, and looking round saw that the maid Rebecca was standing beside him.

"Haven't you got one word for me?" she said sadly, looking up into his face. "It's but a week, and then never a word of greeting."

"I didn't see you, my lass," Ezra answered. "How does the Priory suit you?"

"One place is the same as another to me," she said drearily. "You asked me to come here and I have come. You said once that you would let me know how I could serve you down here. When am I to know?"

"Why, there's no secret about that. You do serve me when you look after my father as you have done these weeks back. That old woman isn't fit to manage the whole place by herself."

"That wasn't what you meant, though," said the girl, looking at him with questioning eyes. "I remember your face now as you spoke the words. You had something on your mind, and have now, you know, you keep it to yourself. Why won't you trust me with it?"

"I have a great deal to worry me in business matters. Much good it would do telling you about them!"

"It's more than that," said Rebecca, doggedly. "Who is that man who has come down?"

"A business man from London. He has come to consult my father about money matters. Any more questions you would like to ask?"

"I should like to know how long we are to be kept down here, and what the meaning of it all may be."

"We are going back before the end of the winter, and the meaning of it is that Miss Harston is not well and needs a change of air. Now, are you satisfied?" He was determined to allay as far as possible any suspicions that the girl might have previously formed.

"And what brings you down here?" she asked with the same searching look. "You don't come down into this hole without some good reason. I did think at first that you might come down in order to see me, but you soon showed me that it wasn't that. There was a time when you was fond of me."

"So I am now, lass."

"Aye, very fond! Not a word nor a look from you last time you came. You must have some reason, though, that brings you here."

"There's nothing wonderful in a man coming to see his own father." "Much you cared for him in London," she cried with a shrill laugh. "If he was under the sod you would not be the sadder. It's my belief as you come down after that doll-faced missy upstairs." As the light faded and the grey of evening deepened into darkness Kate sat patiently in her little room. A coal fire sparkled and sparkled in the rusty grate, and there was a tin bucket full of coals beside the fender from which to replenish it. She was very cold, so she drew her single chair up to the blaze and held her hands over it. It was a lonesome and melancholy vigil, while the wind whistled through the branches of the trees and moaned drearily in the cracks

and crannies of the old house. When were her friends coming? Perhaps something had occurred to detain them to-day. This morning such a thing would have appeared to her to be an impossibility, but now that the time had come when she had expected them, it appeared probable enough that something might have delayed them. To-morrow at latest they could not fail to come. She wondered what they would do if they did arrive. Would they come boldly up the avenue and claim her from the Girdlestons, or would they endeavor to communicate with her first? Whatever they decided upon would be sure to be for the best.

She went to the window once and looked out. It promised to be a wild night. Far away in the southwest lay a great cumulus of rugged clouds from which dark streamers radiated over the sky, like the advance guard of an army. Here and there a pale star twinkled dimly out through the rifts, but the greater part of the heavens was black and threatening. It was so dark that she could no longer see the sea, but the crashing, booming sound of the great waves filled the air and the salt spray came driving in through the open window. She shut it and resumed her seat by the fire, shivering partly from cold and partly from some vague presentiment of evil.

An hour or more had passed when she heard a step upon the stairs and a knock came to her door. It was Rebecca, with a cup of tea upon a tray and some bread and butter. Kate was grateful at this attention, for it saved her from having to go down to the dining room and face Ezra and his unpleasant looking companion. Rebecca laid down the tray, and then to her mistress's surprise turned back and shut the door. The girl's face was very pale, and her manner was mild and excited.

"Here's a note for you," she said. "It was given Mrs. Jorrocks to give you, but I am better at climbing stairs than she is, so I brought it up." She handed Kate a little slip of paper as she spoke.

A note for her? Could it be that her friends had arrived and had managed to send a message to her? It must be so. She took it from the maid. As she did so she noticed that her hands were shaking as though she had the ague.

"You are not well, Rebecca," said Kate, kindly.

"Oh, yes, I am. You read your note and don't mind me," the girl answered in her usual surly fashion. Instead of leaving the room she was bustling about the bed as though putting things in order. Kate's impatience was too great to allow her to wait, so she untwisted the paper, which had no seal or fastening. She had hoped in her heart to see the name of her lover at the end of it. Instead of that her eye fell upon the signature of Ezra Girdlestone. What could he have to say to her? She moved the solitary candle on to the mantelpiece, and read the following note roughly scribbled upon a coarse piece of paper:

"My Dear Miss Harston—I am afraid your confinement here has been very irksome to you. I have repeatedly requested my father to alleviate or modify it, but he has invariably refused. As he still persists in his refusal, I wish to offer you my aid, and to show you that I am your sincere friend in spite of all that has passed, if you could slip out to-night at nine o'clock and meet me by the withered oak at the head of the avenue, I shall see you safe to Bedworth, and you can, if you wish, go on to Portsmouth by the next train. I shall manage so that you may find the door open by that time. I shall not, of course, go to Portsmouth with you, but shall return here after dropping you at the station. I do this small thing to show you that, hopeless as it may be, the affection which I bear you is still as deep as ever. Yours, E. Girdlestone."

Our heroine was so surprised at this epistle that she sat for some time dangling the slip of paper between her fingers and lost in thought. When she glanced round, Rebecca had left the room. She rolled the paper up and threw it into the fire. Ezra, then, was not so hard-hearted as she had thought him. He had used his influence to soften his father. Should she accept this chance of escape, or should she await some word from her friends? Perhaps they were already in Bedworth, but did not know how to communicate with her. If so, this offer of Ezra's was just what was needed. In any case, she could go on to Portsmouth and telegraph from there to the Dimsdales. It was too good an offer to be refused. She made up her mind that she would accept it. It was past eight now and nine was the hour. She stood up with the intention of putting on her cloak and bonnet.

CHAPTER XXII.

Ezra and his father had composed the letter together, and the former handed it to Mrs. Jorrocks, with a request that she should deliver it. It chanced, however, that Rebecca, keenly alive to any attempt at communication between the young merchant and mistress, saw the crone hobbling down the passage with the note in her hand.

"What's that, mother?" she asked. "It's a letter for her," wheezed the old woman, nodding her tremulous head in the direction of Kate's room.

"I'll take it up," said Rebecca eagerly. "I am just going up there with her tea."

"Thank ye. Them stairs tries my rheumatiz something cruel."

The maid took the note and carried it upstairs. Instead of taking it straight to her mistress she slipped into her own room and read every word of it. It appeared to confirm her worst suspicions. Here was Ezra asking an interview with the woman whom he had assured her that he hated. It was true that the request was made in measured words and on a plausible pretext. No doubt that was merely to deceive any other eye which might rest upon it. There was an understanding between them, and this was an assignment. The girl walked swiftly up and down the room like a caged tigress, striking her head with her clenched hands in her anger, and biting her lip until blood came. It was some time before she could overcome her agitation sufficiently to deliver the note, and when she did so her mistress, as we have seen, noticed that her manner was nervous and wild. She little dreamed of the struggle which was going on in the dark-eyed girl's mind against the impulse which urged her to seize her imagined rival by the white throat and choke the life out of her.

"It's eight o'clock now," Ezra was saying downstairs. "I wonder whether she will come?"

"She is sure to come," his father said briefly. "Suppose she didn't?" "In that case we should find other means to bring her out. We have not gone so far to break down over a trifle at the last moment."

"I feel as cold as ice and as nervous as a cat. I can't understand how you look so unconcerned. If you were going to sign an invoice or audit an account or anything else in the way of business you could not take it more calmly. I wish the time would come. This waiting is terrible."

Ezra, leaning back in his chair with the firelight flickering over his haggard but still handsome face, looked across at his father with a puzzled expression. He had never yet been able to determine whether the old man was a consummate hypocrite or a religious monomaniac. Burt lay with his feet in the light of the fire and his head sunk back across the arm of the chair, fast asleep and snoring loudly. "Isn't it time to wake him up?" Ezra asked, interrupting the reading.

"Yes, I think it is," his father answered.

Ezra took up the candle and held it over the sleeping man. "What a brute he looks!" he said. "Did ever you see such an animal in your life?"

The navy was certainly not a pretty sight. His muscular arms and legs were all a-sprawl, and his head hung back at a strange angle to his body, so that his heavy beard pointed upwards, exposing all the thick snowy throat beneath it. His eyes were half open and looked bleared and unhealthy, while his thick lips puffed out with a whistling sound at every expiration. His dirty brown coat was thrown open, and out of one of the pockets protruded a short thick cudgel with a leaden head. John Girdlestone picked it out and tried it in the air.

"I think I could kill an ox with this," he said.

"Don't wave it about my head," cried Ezra. "As you stand in the firelight brandishing that stick in your long arms you are less attractive than usual."

John Girdlestone smiled and replaced the cudgel in the sleeper's pocket. "Wake up, Burt," he cried, shaking him by the arm. "It's half-past eight."

The navy started to his feet and then fell back into his chair, staring round him vacantly, at a loss as to where he might be.

"I've been asleep, guv'nor," he said hoarsely. "Dird you say it was time for the job?"

"We have made arrangements by which she will be out by the withered oak at nine o'clock."

"Come on, then," said the navy. "Who is a-comin' with me?"

"We shall both come," answered John Girdlestone, firmly. "You will need help to carry her to the railway line."

"Surely Burt can do that himself," Ezra remarked. "She's not so very heavy."

Girdlestone drew his son aside. "Don't be so foolish, Ezra," he said. "It must be done with the greatest carelessness and precision, and no traces left. Our old business watchword was to overlook everything ourselves, and we shall certainly do so now."

"It's a horrible affair!" Ezra said, with a shudder. "I wish I was out of it."

"You won't think that to-morrow morning when you realize that the firm is saved and no one the wiser. He has gone on. Don't lose sight of him."

They both hurried out, and found Burt standing in front of the door. It was blowing half a gale now, and the wind was bitterly cold. There came a melancholy rasping and rustling from the leafless wood, and every now and again a sharp crackling sound would announce that some rotten branch had come crashing down. The clouds drove across the face of the moon, so that at times the old monastery, while at others all was plunged in darkness. From the open door a broad golden bar was shot across the lawn from the lamp in the hall. The three figures with their long fantastic shadows looked eerie and unnatural in the yellow glare.

"What if she fails to come?"

From the spot where they stood they had a view of the whole of the Priory. Kate could not come out without being seen. Above the door was a long narrow window which opened upon the staircase. On this Girdlestone and his son fixed their eyes, for they knew that on her way down she would be visible at it. As they looked, the dim light which shone through it was obscured and then reappeared.

"She has passed!"

"Hush!"

(To be continued.)

A Watch of the Blind.

The novel watch for the blind invented by George Meyer, a German watchmaker, is designed to supply a reliable timepiece at a much more moderate cost than any yet used by the sightless. The dial has an ordinary minute hand, while the hours are indicated by twelve buttons in relief, each button sinking into the dial in turn with the passage of the hours. To find the time, the fingers are passed over the dial, when the depressed button makes known the hour, and the hand gives the minute by its position. The dial covers a circular plate which takes the place of the ordinary hour hand, as its circumference has a notch into which each button drops in turn as the movement of the works causes the plate to revolve.

High Altitude for a Kite.

The highest altitude ever reached by a kite in this country, according to Prof. Henry of the weather bureau, is that recorded recently at the Mount Weather station in Virginia, when an altitude of slightly over 23,000 feet was attained. At that height a temperature of 5 degrees below zero was recorded. Prof. Henry says that experiments in kite flying have been carried on in other countries where an altitude of 23,000 feet was recorded. That means a height of about four and one-third miles.

Why the Weaker Sex?

"Pa, why do they call women the weaker sex?" "That's something I've never been able to figure out myself," responded the fond parent.—Detroit Free Press.

A TRICK OF MEMORY.

Memory is one of the most useful and least trustworthy of our faculties. "I mind it well, but I hae ma doots o' ma mind!" said a canny Scotchman in the witness box. A wholesome charity for the mistakes of others was learned by a certain woman from her own experience. She was about to cross the continent for a three months' visit. On the day of her departure she went to the safety deposit vault where she kept her valuables, and said to the manager that she wanted to take her box, with its contents, to her lawyer's office for an hour. Could he arrange that for her? The manager assented, and wrapped the box in a newspaper, that it might make an inconspicuous bundle.

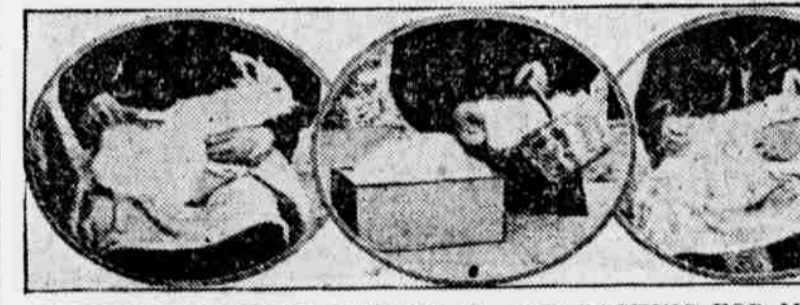
The day passed and the woman did not return. The next morning, inquiry revealed the fact that she had gone on her journey. The manager was curious enough to ask her lawyer if he knew anything about the box.

"She left here intending to take it directly to you," said the lawyer.

That was enough to justify a telegram, as soon as the woman had reached her destination, six days later. Telegram: "Where did you put your safety deposit box?" Answer: "In the vault where it belonged." Telegram: "It is not there. Return at once."

Another week passed in wretched suspense for everyone concerned. When the woman arrived, she was in a state of nervous rage, and ready to accuse the officials of every crime in the calendar. She declared she had driven straight from her lawyer to the vault. The manager had himself let her in, and talked with her. Her story was complete in all its details. But the

FRENCH MAKE MONEY REARING ANGORA RABBITS.



COMBING THE HAIR, PICKING IT, AND PACKING FOR MARKET.

Thrifty French men and women make tidy sums of money rearing Angora rabbits, and selling their hair or fleece, which is woven into a superior quality of cloth much like silk, and is worn next the skin by those afflicted with rheumatism, who say they derive beneficial results. The better the animal is nourished and cared for, the longer, finer and thicker is the hair. The rabbits are also consumed for food. It is said that with proper care each rabbit may be made to yield a net profit of three dollars a year, and the occupation is very pleasant.

records of the deposit company did not substantiate it. That cast doubt enough on it so that it seemed worth while to look up the cabman who had driven the woman on that fateful day.

He was found. He remembered the circumstance well.

Had any recollection of stopping anywhere else? Scratching his grizzled head, he slowly retraced the course, and then said, "Why, yes! We stopped at the bakeshop on the corner of 3d street, and you went in!"

Here was the clew. A hasty visit to the bakery revealed the newspaper bundle tucked away on a high shelf, with its precious contents undisturbed. There it had stood for a fortnight, while a woman and a half-dozen men were staying awake by night and fretting by day, accusing each other of lying and stealing, all because one woman's intention got ahead of her performance and imprinted a lie on the tablets of her memory.—Youth's Companion.

NO LONGER LOVED.

Violets Purchased Only by Old-Fashioned Men Who Say "Thank You."

If a straw may show which way the wind blows, says a well-known newspaper writer, then a violet may also serve as a vane to indicate the passing zephyrs of society.

In the present vanishing of the violet, there is no better indicator of this radical change between the woman our fathers used to call "mother" as she stitched and sewed and smiled upon her little brood, supremely happy with the bouquet of violets that sometimes graced her gown, and the smart, up-to-date Mrs. B.

Formerly when flowers were distinctly emblematic, deep with esoteric meaning, there was no greater compliment than to be presented with a bunch of violets. Poets the world over, since Adam delved and Eve went violeting, have rhapsodized over the womanly significance of its quiet fragrance. From first reader ditties about the "mossy dell where the humble violets grew," to Napoleon's eloquent tribute as he plucked it as the springtime emblem of his return from Elba, and also of Josephine's devotion, everywhere from garret to throne, it has nodded its lowly head, with a success undreamed of by haughty garden beauties. Modesty, sweetness, innate gentility—these glowed in the deep blue of each fragrant messenger. But, gracious alive, who wants to be that nowadays?

"Violets? Dear me! Don't get those," said the florist with a prescient glance like an up-to-date Sybil with a fat bank account. "They're way out of style. No one ever buys violets any more! They're too little, too modest," she pointed to a few meager bouquets that looked very modest indeed, drooping on their wilted stems.

"They're not half showy enough, not

quite correct," she beamed, with definite finality, "and one might just as well be out of the world as out of the style, you know. Of course they're sweet and pretty and fragrant, and all that," she said, giving them a vigorous shake, as though they needed a course in gymnastics. "But who wants anything like that, indeed?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes some men, the old-fashioned kind, that wear silk hats and say 'thank you,' occasionally buy them, and then, too, when a girl is in mourning and can't wear anything else, there is a slight demand, but to send violets to a girl!"—she held up her hands in horror.

"Why, I am sure she'd give them to the cook."

"Well, what do they like?" I asked. For answer I was treated to a glance that would have been a credit to an emigrant inspector.

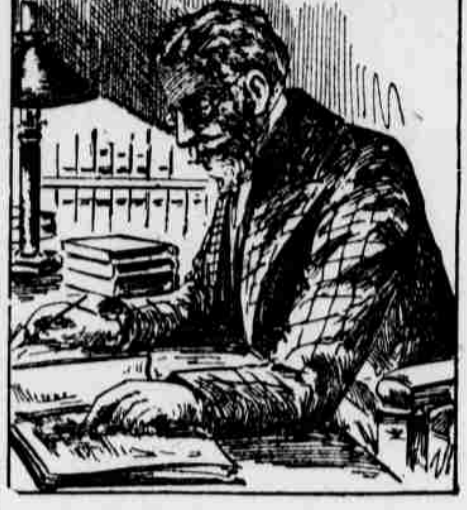
"Like?" echoed sharp-eyed Sybil. "Why, anything that stands out, shows off; lets everybody know that you're wearing them, speaks for themselves; that's what they want."

She swept by a bower of roses, dusky with velvet beauty, and pointed to a great patch of gaudy orchids.

"There! there!" she exclaimed. "That's the kind that makes the hit; just look at them. There won't be one left after the ball to-night. Of course, I'll have to fall back on the roses to help out, but it'll be those bright ones there," she pointed to a crimson blot staining some snow-white hyacinths in the case beyond. "You know," she

confided, "I do believe some girls would wear sunflowers if they were only fashionable. Those chrysanthemums and bright flowers do make an awful hit, and as for orchids—I followed her forefinger trying to find some mythical meaning other than a loud plea for dollars and cents. "Those, of course,

THE WEEKLY HISTORIAN



- 1404—Jamaica discovered by Columbus and named St. Jago by him.
- 1602—Queen Mary II, of England born.
- 1670—The Hudson's Bay Company formed in England.
- 1707—Legislative union of England and Scotland put into effect.
- 1775—The Quebec Act became law, providing for the government of Canada by Governor and Council.
- 1776—Adoption of the Pine Tree flag by great and general court of Massachusetts.
- 1788—Maryland ratified the Constitution of the United States.
- 1808—Spanish organized a revolt against Napoleon. Charles IV, of Spain abdicated in favor of Bonaparte. Union Temperance Society formed in Saratoga county, New York, this being the beginning of the Prohibition movement in the United States.
- 1827—French National Guard disbanded.
- 1854—First railroad opened in Brazil.
- 1856—Montmorency bridge fell.
- 1859—Colorado river expedition ended.
- 1865—Sir Samuel Cunard, founder of the Cunard steamship line, died.
- 1877—Occupation of Bayazid by the Russians.
- 1878—First elevated trains run on Third avenue in New York City.
- 1881—First sod turned in the construction of the Canadian Pacific railway.
- 1882—Charles S. Parnell, the Irish leader, released from Kilmalham jail.
- 1885—Col. Otter attacked the Canadian rebels at Cut Knife Creek.
- 1888—Henry M. Stanley found Emin Pasha on the shores of Albert Nyanza.
- 1894—Many lives lost by earthquakes in Venezuela. International bimetallic conference met in London.
- 1898—Spanish fleet destroyed in battle of Manila bay.
- 1903—Landslide at Frank, B. C., with the loss of seventy-five lives.
- 1905—A score of lives lost in a tornado at Laredo, Texas. Steamer Falk wrecked off Laredo, with loss of nearly 100 lives.
- 1907—Attempted assassination of President Cabrera of Guatemala.

THE GREAT RAILROADS

Construction work on the line of the Erie and Jersey road and the Genesee River road is being pushed rapidly. The South Dakota railroad and warehouse commission has decided to order freight rates reduced west of the Missouri river. A new tariff is now being worked out.

The balancing of the books of the Pennsylvania railroad for 1907 shows that, while the system earned \$30,000,000 more than in 1906, it paid \$10,500,000 more for labor, or 65 per cent on the increased earnings.

Those opposed to closing the Red river to navigation had a majority at the hearing before Major Schuck of the United States engineer corps at Fargo, and they are confident that the plan to close the river below Belmont will be rejected by the federal government.

Roads running east from Chicago seem to be all at sea regarding the policy to be adopted on the testing of the constitutionality of the 2-cent maximum rate laws passed by many of the States. The matter was taken out of the hands of the passenger officials by their executive officers some time ago.

The usual cut-and-dried proceedings at meetings of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada were varied at the semi-annual gathering of the directors of the road in London, by heated charges of mismanagement, and the report of the board was only adopted after earnest appeals for unity of interest for the company's credit had been made.

An order for 200 refrigerator cars was placed recently by the Northern Pacific as an addition to its equipment in order to be fully prepared to handle the annual fruit crop of the Northwest. It is expected that the demands on the roads this year will be heavier than ever, and for that reason those reaching the fruit districts are all providing extra equipment. One road which began in 1899 by handling 118 cars, expects to haul 3,500 this year.

Some of the eastern roads are said to be working out a system whereby the National Educational Association not only will be given a rate of 1 1/2 cents a mile for the round trip for its annual convention, which is to be held this year at Cleveland, but will continue to receive the \$2 membership fee which the roads in past years collected for it, without getting into conflict with the ruling of the Interstate Commerce Commission that it is illegal for the roads to collect this fee in connection with the sale of tickets and then turn over the amount thus collected in a gross sum to the association.