

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XXIII.—(Continued.)

The voices and the footsteps sounded louder and louder, until they were just at the other side of the boundary. They seemed to come from several people walking slowly and heavily. There was the shrill ringing of a key and the wooden door swung back on its rusty hinges, while three dark figures passed out who appeared to bear some burden between them. The party in the shadow crouched closer still, and peered through the darkness with eager anxious eyes. They could discern little save the vague outlines of the moving men, and yet as they gazed at them an unaccountable and overpowering horror crept into the hearts of every one of them. They breathed an atmosphere of death.

The newcomers tramped across the road, and pushing through the thin hedge, ascended the railway embankment upon the other side. It was evident that their burden was a heavy one, for they stopped more than once while ascending the steep grassy slope, and once, when near the top, one of the party slipped, and there was a sound as though he had fallen upon his knees, together with a stifled oath. They reached the top, however, and their figures, which had disappeared from view, came into sight again standing out dimly against the murky sky. They bent down over the railway line, and placed the indistinguishable mass which they bore carefully upon it.

"We must have the light," said a voice. "No, no; there's no need," another expostulated.

"We can't work in the dark," said the third, loudly and harshly. "Where's the lantern, guv'nor? I've got a lucifer."

"We must manage that the train passes over right," the first voice remarked. "Here, Burt, you light it."

"There was the sharp sound of the striking of a match, and a feeble glimmer appeared in the darkness. It flickered and waned, as though the wind would extinguish it, but next instant the wick of the lantern had caught, and threw a strong yellow glare upon the scene. The light fell upon the major and his comrades, who had sprung into the road, and it lit up the group on the railway line. Yet it was not upon the rescuing party that murderers fixed their terror-stricken eyes, and the major and his friends had lost all thought of the miscreants above them—for there standing in the center of the roadway, with their light flickering over pale sweet faces, like a spirit from the tomb, stood no other than the much-enduring, cruelly-treated girl for whom Burt's murderous blow had been intended.

For a few seconds she stood there without either party moving a foot or uttering a sound. Then there came from the railway a cry so wild that it will ring forever in the ears of those who heard it. Burt dropped upon his knees and put his hands over his eyes to keep out the sight. John Girdlestone caught his son by the wrist and dashed away in the darkness, flying wildly, madly, with white face and staring eyes, as men who have looked upon that which is not of this world. In the meantime, Tom had sprung down from his perch, and had clasped Kate in his arms, and there she lay, sobbing and laughing, with many pretty feminine ejaculations and exclamations and questions, saved at last from the net of death, which had been closing upon her so long.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The ruffian Burt was so horror-stricken at the sight of the girl whom he imagined that he had murdered, that he lay groveling on the railway line by the side of his victim, moaning with terror, and incapable of any resistance. He was promptly seized by the major's party, and the Nihilist secured his hands with a handkerchief so quickly and effectively that it was clearly not the first time that he had performed the feat. He then calmly drew a very long and bright knife from the recesses of his frock coat, and having pressed it against Burt's nose to insure his attention, he brandished it in front of him in a menacing way, as a hint that an attempt at escape might be dangerous.

"And who is die?" asked Baunser, lifting up the dead woman's head, and resting it upon his knee.

"Poor girl! She will never speak again, whoever she may have been," the major said, holding the lantern to her cold, pale face. "Here's where the convulsions struck her. Death must have been instantaneous and painless. I could have sworn it was the young lady we came sworn to if it were not that we have her safe down there, thank the Lord!"

"Where are those others?" asked Von Baunser, peering about through the darkness. "If there is justice in the country, they will bring for the work of this night."

"They are off," the major answered, laying the girl's head reverently down again. "It's hopeless to follow them, as we know nothing of the country, nor which direction they took. They ran like madmen. Hullo! What can this be?"

The sight which had attracted the veteran's attention was nothing less than the appearance at the end of the lane of three brilliant luminous discs moving along abreast of one another. They came rapidly nearer, increasing in brilliancy as they approached. Then a voice rang out of the darkness. "There they are, officers! Close with them! Don't let 'em get away!" and before the major and his party could quite grasp the situation they were valiantly charged by three of those much-enduring, stout-hearted mortals known as the British police force.

These three burly Hampshire policemen, having been placed upon our friends' track by the ostler of the Flying Bull, and having themselves observed maneuvers

which could only be characterized as suspicious, charged down with such vehemence that in less time than it takes to tell it, both Tom and the major and Von Baunser were in safe custody. The Nihilist, who had an inextinguishable hatred of the law, and who could never be brought to understand that it might under any circumstances be on his side, pulled himself very straight and held his knife down at his hip as though he meant to use it, while Bulow, of Kiel, likewise assumed an aggressive attitude. Fortunately, however, the appearance of the prisoners and a few hurried words of the major made the inspector in charge understand how the land lay, and he transferred his attentions to Burt, on whose wrists he placed the handcuffs. He then listened to a more detailed account of the circumstances from the lips of the major.

"Who is this young lady?" he asked, pointing to Kate.

"This is the Miss Harston whom we came to rescue, and for whom no doubt the blow was intended which killed this unhappy girl."

"Perhaps, sir," said the inspector to Tom, "you had better take her up to the house."

"Thank you," said Tom, and went off through the wood with Kate upon his arm. On their way she told him how, being unable to find her bonnet and cloak, which Rebecca had abstracted, she had determined to keep her appointment without them. Her delay rendered her a little late, however; but on reaching the withered oak she heard voices and steps in front of her, which she had followed.

These had led her to the open gate, and the lighting of the lantern had revealed her to friends and foes. Ere she concluded her story Tom noticed that she leaned more and more heavily upon him, until by the time that they reached the Priory he was obliged to lift her up and carry her to prevent her from falling. The hardships of the last few weeks, and this final terrible and yet more joyful incident of all, had broken down her strength. He bore her into the house, and laying her by the fire in the dining room, watched tenderly over her, and exhausted his humble stock of medical knowledge in devising remedies for her condition.

In the meantime the inspector having thoroughly grasped the major's lucid narrative, was taking prompt and energetic measures.

"You go down to the station, Constable Jones," he ordered. "Wire to London, John Girdlestone, aged sixty-one, and his son, aged twenty-eight, wanted for murder. Address, Eccleston square and Fenchurch street, City. Send a description of them. Father, six feet one inch in height, hatchet-faced, grey hair and whiskers, deep-set eyes, heavy brows, round shoulders. Son, five feet ten, dark faced, black eyes, black curly hair, strongly made, well dressed."

"Yes, that's near enough," observed the man.

"Wise to every station along the line to be on the lookout. Send a description to the chief constable of Portsmouth, and have a watch kept on the shipping. That should catch them. Let us carry the poor soul up to the house," the inspector continued, after making careful examination of the ground all round the body. The party assisted in raising the girl up, and in carrying her back along the path by which she had been brought.

Burt tramped stolidly along behind with the remaining policeman beside him. The Nihilist brought up the rear with his keen eyes fixed upon the navy, and his knife still ready for use. When they reached the Priory the prisoner was safely locked away in one of the numerous empty rooms, while Rebecca was carried upstairs and laid upon the very bed which had been hers.

"We must search the house," the inspector said, and Mrs. Jorrocks having been brought out of her room, and having forthwith fainted and been revived again, was ordered to accompany the police in their investigation, which she did in a very dazed and stupefied manner. Indeed, not a word could be got from her until, entering the dining room, she perceived her bottle of Holland's upon the table, on which she raised up her voice and cursed the whole company, from the inspector downwards, with the shrillest volubility of invective. Having satisfied her soul in this manner, she wound up by a perfect shriek of profanity, and breaking away from her guardians, she regained the shelter of her room and locked herself up there, after which they could hear by the drumming of her heels that she went into a violent hysterical attack upon the floor.

Kate had, however, recovered sufficiently to be able to show the police the different rooms, and to explain to them which was which. The inspector examined the scanty furniture of Kate's apartment with great interest.

"You say you have been living here for three weeks," he said.

"Nearly a month," Kate answered. "No wonder you look pale and ill. You have a fine prospect from the window." He drew the blind aside and looked out into the darkness. A gleam of moonlight lay upon the heaving ocean, and in the center of this silver streak was a single brown-sailed fishing boat running to the eastward before the wind. The inspector's keen eye rested upon it for an instant, and then he dropped the blind and turned away. It never flashed across his mind that the men whom he was hunting down could have chosen this means of escape, and were already beyond his reach.

CHAPTER XXV.

Ezra Girdlestone had given many indications during his life, both in Africa and elsewhere, of being possessed of the power of grasping a situation and of acting for the best at the shortest notice. He never showed this quality more conclusively than at that terrible moment, when he realized not only that the crime in which he had participated had failed, but that that all was discovered, and that his father and he were hunted criminals. With the same intuitive quickness which made him instantly what were the only available means of escape, and proceeded at once to adopt them. If they could but reach the vessel of the Captain Hamilton Miggs they might defy the pursuit of the law. He had hired a boat near Claxton.

The Black Eagle had dropped down the Thames on the very Saturday which was so fruitful of eventful episodes. Miggs would lie at Gravesend, and intended afterwards to beat round to the Downs, there to await the final instructions of the firm. If they could catch him before

he left, there was very little chance that he would know anything of what had occurred. It was a fortunate chance that the next day was Sunday, and there would be no morning paper to enlighten him as to the doings in Hampshire. They had only to invent some plausible excuse for their wish to accompany him, and get him to drop them upon the Spanish coast. Once out of sight of England, and on the broad ocean, what detective could follow their track?

They reached the ship. The early part of the voyage of the Black Eagle was extremely fortunate. The wind came round to the eastward and wafted them steadily down channel, until on the third day they saw the Isle of Ushant lying low upon the skyline. No inquisitive gunboat, or lurking police launch came within sight of them, though whenever any vessel's course brought her in their direction the heart of Ezra Girdlestone sunk within him. On one occasion a small brig signalled to them, and the wretched fugitives, when they saw the flags run up, thought that all was lost. It proved, however, to be merely some trivial message, and the two owners breathed again.

The wind fell away on the day that they cleared the channel, and the whole surface of the sea was like a great expanse of quicksilver which shimmered in the rays of the wintry sun. There was still a considerable swell after the recent gale, and the Black Eagle lay rolling about as though she had learned habits of inebriation from her skipper. The sky was very clear about, but all round the horizon a low haze lay upon the water. So silent was it that the creaking of the boats as they swung at the davits, and the straining of the shrouds as the ship rolled, sounded loud and clear, as did the raucous cries of a couple of gulls who hovered round the poop. Every now and then a rumbling noise ending in a thud down below showed that the swing of the ship had caused something to come down with a run. Underlying all other sounds, however, was a muffled clank, clank, which might almost make one forget that this was a sailing ship, it sounded so like the chipping of a propeller.

"What is that noise, Captain Miggs?" asked John Girdlestone, as he stood leaning over the quarter rail, while the old sea-dog, sextant in hand, was taking his midday observations. The captain had been on his good behavior since the unexpected advent of his employers, and he was now in a wonderful and unprecedented state of sobriety.

"Them's the pumps again," Miggs answered, packing his sextant away in its case.

"The pumps! I thought they were only used when a ship was in danger?" Ezra came along the deck at this moment, and listened with interest to the conversation.

"This ship is in danger," Miggs remarked calmly.

"In danger?" cried Ezra, looking round at the clear sky and placid sea. "Where is the danger? I did not think you were such an old woman, Miggs."

"We will see about that," the seaman answered angrily. "If a ship's got no bottom in her she's bound to be in danger, be the weather fair or foul."

"Do you mean to tell me this ship has no bottom?"

"I mean to tell you that there are places where you could put your fingers through her seams. It's only the pumpin' that keeps her afloat."

"This is a pretty state of things," said Girdlestone. "How is it that I have not been informed of it before? It is most dangerous."

"Informed!" cried Miggs. "Informed of it! Has there been a voyage yet that I haven't come to you, Muster Girdlestone, and told ye I was surprised ever to find myself back in Lannon? A year ago I told ye how this ship was, and ye laughed at me, ye did. It's only when ye find yourselves on her in the middle of the broad sea that ye understand what it is that sailer folk have to put up with."

"I presume," Girdlestone said, in a conciliatory voice, "that there would be no real danger as long as the weather was fine."

"It won't be fine long," the captain answered gruffly. "The glass was well under thirty when I come up, and it is fallin' fast. I've been about here before at this time of year in a calm, with a ground swell and a sinkin' glass. No good ever came of it."

(To be continued.)

Where Crime Begins.

"Of course it was wrong," exclaimed the plain citizen. "He accepted a bribe."

"I don't know," replied the politician, "there's nothing wrong about—"

"What? Why, they caught him with the goods and he admits—"

"Oh! if he was caught at it, of course, it's wrong."—Philadelphia Press.

Getting Nervous.

Mr. Stubbs (reading)—Burglars entered the Van Swell mansion last night and stole the plate.

Mrs. Stubbs—Well, do be careful and lock all the doors to-night, Henry. There is an old blue china plate in the kitchen that I wouldn't have stolen for the world.

High Flyers.

Asker—So this is a club, eh? Are the members conservatives?

Teller—No, half the time they are up in the air.

Asker—Great Jupiter! What kind of a club is it?

Teller—Ballooning.

Heading Him Off.

Floz—I want to give you a piece of good advice, old man.

Knox—All right; but before you do, let me give you a piece.

Floz—What is it?

Knox—Follow the advice you are going to give me.

Comfort.

First Tramp—Gee! but I'd like to live in Alaska.

Second Tramp—Why?

First Tramp—Just think of sleeping six months on one stretch!

One Thing Certain.

Sapleigh—I've got a cold or something in my head, doncher know.

Miss Cutting—Well, if there's anything there it must be a cold.

"FIGHTING BOB" EVANS.



"Fighting Bob" Evans relinquished command of the American fleet and will go on the retired list. It was hoped the brave old sea dog would be able to accompany the fleet around the world, but ill health compelled him to haul down his flag.

Robley Duglison Evans was born in 1846 and is a graduate of the Naval Academy. He received his first baptism of fire at Fort Fisher in 1865; was in command of the Yorktown in 1891, when there was trouble with Chile, and led the battleship Iowa at the battle of Santiago. His sobriquet, "Fighting Bob," was honestly acquired, for he was always in the thickest of the fray. Although a strict disciplinarian, he had a way of giving commands and enforcing obedience that won for him the love and respect of his men.

It was a fitting climax to the noble old admiral's career that he was the ranking officer of the combined fleets at the Golden Gate, the most formidable array of battleships ever assembled. His success in sailing the sixteen American battleships from Hampton Roads to Magdalena Bay, the end of the voyage finding the ships in better condition than when they shipped anchor, won the world's commendation. Those two events furnish a glorious finale to "Fighting Bob's" naval career, which Americans will hope is but a prelude to many years of peaceful retirement.

POPULAR SCIENCE

Messrs. H. P. Cady and D. F. McFarland have found the rare element neon together with helium in natural gas from southeastern Kansas. They report that in addition to all the stronger spectroscopic lines of helium, which they have carefully identified, they find 15 fairly strong lines which cannot be identified with those of any of the familiar gases. These lines having previously been found by Dewar in the spectrum of gas from the Bath Spring, and also reported in lists of lines shown by the more volatile gases from the atmosphere, they suggest that they may represent a new elementary gas.

M. E. Pennington of the Bureau of Chemistry, Department of Agriculture, reports that experiments on milk kept at about the freezing point showed a continuous increase of organisms for five or six weeks. At their maximum they numbered hundreds of millions per cubic centimeter, and occasionally they passed the billion mark. Although the milk experimented with was never solidly frozen, yet after ten days to two weeks it was a mass of small ice crystals. No odor or taste indicated the high bacterial content, and even on heating no curd was produced until the very end of the experiment.

It has often been asserted that Roger Bacon, appreciation of whose scientific requirements is continually growing, knew how to make gunpowder in the thirteenth century, although more or less doubt on the subject has always existed. Confirmation of Bacon's knowledge in this respect is regarded as having been found in a manuscript contained in the National Library in Paris, which has recently been studied by Mons. P. Duhem. Monsieur Duhem believes that this manuscript is a part of Bacon's Opus Tertium, and it clearly indicates a knowledge of the composition, as well as of the explosive energy, of gunpowder.

Of a curious double rainbow an observer says in a letter to the London Times: "On March 14 last, while on the voyage between Jamaica and the Isthmus of Panama at 11 a. m., the sun being then nearly in the zenith, a double rainbow of brilliant coloring appeared, forming a complete circle round the sun, the inner bow being some distance from the sun, the outer bow being about an equal distance from the inner. A clear horizon showed no signs of rain. Neither the captain nor any other soul on board had ever seen a similar phenomenon. The other bow faded gradually away and then the inner bow."

Novel Use for Wooden Eggs.
One of the innumerable things that the manufacturers of turned wood goods make is the darning egg, for use in darning stockings.

These eggs are commonly provided each with a handle of the same kind of wood, which screws into one end, says the New York Sun. A while ago there was received at the New York office of a turned goods manufacturing concern an order for a couple of cases, some thousands in number, of darning eggs to be supplied without handle and of a size somewhat smaller than the stan-

dard; and then for some reason this special lot of eggs was left on the manufacturer's hands. But they were not wasted.

In the course of time there came in a hatpin manufacturer who wanted to leave an order for a few thousand hatpin knobs, to be made in specified shape and dimensions. Besides making regularly a great variety of things the turned goods makers also turn wood in any shape that may be required to order.

And then the salesman recalled that little lot of undersized handleless darning eggs, which proved to be exactly what the hatpin manufacturer wanted, and he took the lot. And so finally they came to be made up, not as darning eggs, with fancy handle, but the knobs of hatpins.



When a female person doesn't want to get married, she is already.

A man can cut down his smoking if he's sick and thinks he's dying.

The way a woman manages a man is by making him think he manages her.

The first essential to being a great man is for him to have no doubt about it himself.

The reason a woman says the baby never cries at night is she believes it is never going to do it again.

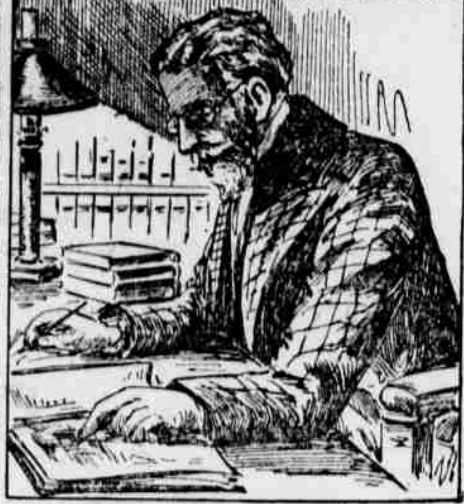
It makes a woman very proud to think how smart the children would be if the school teachers only knew how to teach them.

What satisfaction a woman gets out of her husband's garden is how often she can catch him pretending to know things about it.

A Memory Test.
A professor of mnemonics had gone to lecture at or near Canterbury. After the lecture was finished he had to wait for his London train. It was a most comfortable day, and he retired to an inn for shelter and refreshment. To pass the time he began to exhibit his feats of memory to the yokels in the inn parlor, and one and all were thunderstruck except the waiter. There is always one skeptic in every communion, whether of saints or sinners. Do what he would he could not mitigate the acid smile of acid incredulity of that glorified potman! In the midst of one of his most difficult feats the whistle sounded of the "Only train to London-to-night!" and he rushed off to catch it. He caught it at the station, and his reputation caught it in the inn parlor, for the waiter, coming in with some ordered refreshments and finding him gone, pointed to the corner where he had been sitting and exclaimed, "Silly 'umbug, he's forgot his umbrella!"—Young Man.

Disappointment.
Amateur Sportsman (after shooting best friend)—Too bad, too bad; but I thought you were a deer. The Victim—Don't fret. Amateur Sportsman—Don't fret! Why man, I promised my wife a pair of horns.—Illustrated Bits.

THE WEEKLY HISTORIAN



1284—London Fishmongers' company founded.

1588—Spanish Armada sailed from the Tagus for England.

1643—Royalists victorious at battle of Stratton.

1702—Commencement of hostilities in Queen Anne's war, that of the Spanish succession.

1763—Fort Sandusky, Ohio, taken by Indians.

1765—One-fourth of the city of Montreal destroyed by fire.

1774—Charter of Massachusetts annulled and people declared rebels by Parliament.

1775—Declaration of Independence adopted at Mecklenburg, N. C.

1797—An extra session of Congress convened to consider the strained relations between the United States and France.

1802—Napoleon I. instituted the Legion of Honor.

1803—England declared war against Bonaparte.

1804—Napoleon I. proclaimed Emperor of the French.

1806—England took possession of the Island of Anholt, Denmark.

1825—Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell, first woman ordained as a minister, born near Rochester, N. Y.

1829—Second cotton factory in South Carolina established at Pendleton.

1832—Election riots in Montreal.

1841—Twenty-five lives lost by a fall of rock from Cape Diamond, Quebec.

1843—The Free church of Scotland established.

1847—Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator, died in Kerry, Ireland. Aug. 6, 1775.

1849—Smith O'Brien expelled from the British House of Commons.

1858—Capture of the Peiho forts.

1859—French and Sardinians defeated the Austrians at Montebello.

1862—First day in Richmond, Va.

1864—First express trains run between New Jersey and Buffalo.

1865—Jefferson Davis imprisoned in Fortress Monroe.

1871—Vendome Column, erected by Napoleon I. to commemorate his victories, pulled down by the Communists in Paris.

1875—Donald A. Macdonald entered office of lieutenant governor of Ontario.

1879—St. Patrick's cathedral, New York City, dedicated.

1882—The British expedition arrived at Alexandria, Egypt.

1885—Surrender of Louis Riel, leader of "Riel's Rebellion."

1886—British evacuation of Suakin completed.

1889—Great loss of property by fire in Quebec.

1893—United States Supreme Court sustained the Chinese Exclusion act.

1894—The Manchester ship canal opened.

1900—British force under Gen. Buller occupied Dundee, South Africa.

1904—Pool rooms in New York City shut off from telegraphic service.

1906—Four towns in northern Michigan destroyed by forest fires.

SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

A committee of St. Paul Aldermen has adopted an ordinance providing that hereafter school buildings in the city shall be of fireproof construction.

St. Olaf College of Northfield defeated Gustavus Adolphus College of St. Peter in debate. St. Olaf had the negative of the municipal ownership question.

Rev. Edwin A. Schnell of La Porte, Ind., has been elected president of the Iowa Wesleyan university at Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and has accepted the position.

James A. Bull, for many years an active supporter of the Minnesota State agricultural school, died suddenly at his home in Edina Mills, a suburb of Minneapolis.

The Nebraska State university Senata has requested the resignations of Dr. J. T. Lees and Dr. T. L. Bolton, faculty members of the university athletic board. Dr. Lees took a prominent part in revising foot ball rules at the conference held in New York. Students objected to the method of holding the athletic board election and the two members were ousted.

The seminary building at Westington Springs, S. D., burned last winter, is to be replaced by a new granite and pressed brick structure, costing \$20,840. Westington has also let the contract for a public school building to cost \$25,934.

In the legal contest to decide whether or not the Minneapolis board of education can suspend a pupil who is backward in his studies, Lindsley Pilkey won his first point in the controversy before Judge Simpson, who issued an order commanding the school board to reinstate young Pilkey until final argument on the point involved is completed.