

# The Firm of Girdlestone

BY  
A. CONAN DOYLE

## CHAPTER III—(Continued.)

"You're raving, Baumer," said Major Clutterbuck, excitedly. "Why, man, their names are above suspicion. They are looked upon as the soundest concern in the city."

"Dat may be; dat may be," the German answered stolidly. "What I know I know, and what I say I say."

"And how d'ye know it? D'ye tell me that you know more about it than the men on 'Change and the firms that do business with them?"

"I know what I know, and I say what I say," the other repeated.

"And you won't tell me where you heard this of the Girdlestons?"

"It would be no good to you. It is enough that what I say is certain. Let it suffice that they are people that are bound to tell other people all that they know about anything whatsoever."

"You don't make it very clear now," the old soldier grumbled. "You mean that these secret societies and socialists let each other know all that comes in their way, and have their own means of getting information?"

"Dat may be, and dat may not be," the German answered in the same oracular voice. "I thought in any case, my good friend Clutterbuck, that I would give you what you call it in English the straight tap. It is always well to have the straight tap."

"Thank ye, me boy," the major said heartily. "If the firm's in a bad way either the youngster doesn't know of it, or else he's the most natural actor that ever lived. There's the tap-bell; let's get down before the bread and butter is all finished."

Mrs. Robins was in the habit of furnishing her lodgers with an evening meal at a small sum per head. There was only a certain amount of bread and butter supplied for this, however, and those who came late were likely to find an empty platter. The two Bohemians felt that the subject was too grave a one to trifle with, so they suspended their judgment upon the Girdlestons while they clattered down to the dining room.

## CHAPTER IV.

Although not a whisper had been heard of it in ordinary commercial circles, there was some foundation for the forecast which Von Baumer had made as to the fate of the great house of Girdlestone. For some time back matters had been going badly with the African traders. If the shrewd eyes of Major Tobias Clutterbuck were unable to detect any indications of this state of affairs in the manner or conversation of the junior partner, the reason simply was that that gentleman was entirely ignorant of the imminent danger which hung over his head. As far as he knew, the concern was as prosperous and as flourishing as it had been at the time of the death of John Harston. The momentous secret was locked in the breast of his grim old father, who bore it about with him as the Spartan lad did the fox—without a quiver or groan to indicate the care which was gnawing at his heart. Placed face to face with him, Girdlestone fought against it desperately, and, without, coolly and warily, throwing away so chance and leaving no stone unturned. Above all, he exerted himself—and exerted himself successfully—to prevent any rumour of the critical position of the firm from leaking out in the city.

Many things had contributed towards this state of affairs. The firm had been involved in a succession of misfortunes, some known to the world, and others known to no one save the elder Girdlestone. Lines of five vessels from Liverpool and from Hamburg were running to the West coast of Africa, and competition had cut down freightage to the lowest possible point. Where the Girdlestons had once held almost a monopoly there were now many in the field. Again the negroes of the coast were becoming educated, and had a keen eye to business, so that the old profits were no longer obtainable. The days had gone by when flint-lock guns and Manchester prints could be weighed in the balance against ivory and gold dust.

While these general causes were at work a special misfortune had befallen the house of Girdlestone. Finding that their fleet of old sailing vessels were too slow and clumsy to compete with more modern ships, they had bought in two first-rate steamers. One was the Providence, a fine screw vessel of twelve hundred tons, and the other was the Evening Star, somewhat smaller in size, but both classed A 1 at Lloyd's. The former cost twenty-two thousand pounds, and the latter seventeen thousand. Now, Mr. Girdlestone had always had a weakness for petty savings, and in this instance he determined not to insure his new vessels. If the crazy old tubs, for which he had paid fancy premiums for so many years with an eye to an ultimate profit, met with no disaster, surely those new powerful clippers were safe. It chanced, however, by strange luck that as the Evening Star was steaming up Channel in a dense fog on her return from her second voyage, she ran right into the Providence, which had started that very morning from Liverpool upon her third outward trip. The Providence was almost cut in two, and sank within five minutes, taking down the captain and six of the crew, while the Evening Star was so much damaged about the bows that she put into Plymouth in a sinking condition. That day's work cost the African firm more than five-and-thirty thousand pounds.

Other mishaps had occurred to weaken the firm, apart from their trade with the coast. The senior partner had engaged in speculation without the knowledge of

his son, and the result had been disastrous. One of the Cornish tin mines in which he had sunk a large amount of money, and which had hitherto yielded him a handsome return, became suddenly exhausted, and the shares went down to zero. No firm could stand against such a run of bad luck, and the African trading company reeled before it. John Girdlestone had not said a word yet of all this to his son. As claims arose he settled them in the best manner he could, and postponed the inevitable day when he should have to give a true account of their financial position. He hoped against hope that the chapter of accidents or the arrival of some brilliant cargoes from the coast might set the concern on its legs again.

From day to day he had been expecting news of one of his vessels. At last one morning he found a telegram awaiting him at the office. He tore it eagerly open for it bore the Madeira mark. It was from his agent, Jose Alveira, and announced that the voyage from which he had hoped so much had been a total failure. The cargo was hardly sufficient to defray the working expenses. As the merchant read it, his head drooped over the table and he groaned aloud. Another of the props which upheld him from ruin had snapped beneath him.

There were three letters lying beside the telegram. He glanced through them, but there was no consolation in any of them. One was from a bank manager informing him that his account was somewhat overdrawn. Another from Lloyd's Insurance Agency, pointing out that the policies on two of his vessels would lapse unless paid within a certain date. The clouds were gathering very darkly over the African firm, yet the old man bore up against misfortune with dauntless courage. He sat alone in his little room, with his head sunk upon his breast, and his thatched eyebrows drawn down over his keen grey eyes. It was clear to him that the time had come when he must enlighten his son as to the true state of their affairs. With his co-operation he might carry out a plan which was in his mind.

A moment or two later the green baize door flew open, and the young man came in, throwing his hat and coat down on one of the chairs. It was evident that something had ruffled his temper.

"Good morning," he said brusquely, nodding his head to his father.

"What's the matter with you? You don't look yourself, and haven't for some time back."

"Business worries, my boy, business worries," John Girdlestone answered wearily. "I have not got a good balance at the banker's."

"Pretty fair, pretty fair," his son said, knowingly, picking up the long thin volume in which the finance of the firm was recorded, and tapping it against the table.

"But the figures there are not correct, Ezra," his father said, still more huskily. "We have not got nearly so much as that."

"What!" roared the junior partner.

"Hush! Don't let the clerks hear you. We have very little. In fact, Ezra, we have next to nothing in the bank. It is all gone."

For a moment the young man stood motionless, glaring at his father. The expression of incredulity which had appeared on his features faded away before the earnestness of the other, and was replaced by a look of such malignant passion that it contorted his whole face.

"You fool!" he shrieked, springing forward with the book upraised as though he would have struck the old merchant.

"I see it now. You have been speculating on your own hook! What have you done with it?" He seized his father by the collar and shook him furiously in his wrath.

"Keep your hands off me!" the senior partner cried, wrenching himself free from his son's grasp. "I did my best with the money. How dare you address me so?"

"Did your best!" hissed Ezra, hurling the ledger down on the table with a crash. "What did you mean by speculating without my knowledge, and telling me at the same time that I knew all that was done? Hadn't I warned you a thousand times of the danger of it? You are not to be trusted with money."

"Remember, Ezra," his father said with dignity, reseating himself in the chair from which he had risen, in order to free himself from his son's clutches. "If I lost the money, I also made it. This was a flourishing concern before you were born. If the worst comes to the worst you are only where I started. But we are far from being absolutely ruined as yet."

"To think of it!" Ezra cried, flinging himself upon the office sofa and burying his face in his hands. "To think of all I have said of our money and our resources! What will Clutterbuck and the fellows at the club say? How can I alter the ways of life that I have learned?" Then suddenly clenching his hands, and turning upon his father, he broke out, "We must have it back, father; we must, by fair means or foul. You must do it, for it was you who lost it. What can we do? How long have we to do it in? Is this known in the city? Oh, I shall be ashamed to show my face on 'Change.' So he rambled on half-maddened by the pictures of the future which rose up in his mind.

"Be calm, Ezra, be calm," his father said impudently. "We have many chances yet if we only make the best of them. There is no use lamenting the past. I freely confess that I was wrong in using this money without your knowledge, but I did it from the best of motives. We must put our heads together now to retrieve our losses, and there are many ways in which that may be done. I want your clear common sense to help me in the matter."

"Fifty you didn't apply to that before," Ezra said sulkily.

"I have suffered for not doing so," the old man answered meekly. "In considering how to rally under this grievous affliction which has come upon us, we must remember that our credit is a great resource, and one on which we have never drawn. That gives us a broad margin to help us while we are carrying out our plans for the future."

"What will our credit be worth when this matter leaks out?"

"But it can't leak out. No one suspects it for a moment. They might imagine that we are suffering from some temporary depression of trade, but no one could possibly know the sad truth. I have more than one plan in my head by which our affairs may be re-established on their

old footing. If we can once get sufficient money to satisfy our present creditors, and so tide over this run of bad luck, the current will set in the other way, and all will go well. And first of all, there is one question, my boy, which I should like to ask you. What do you think of John Harston's daughter?"

"She's right enough," the young man answered brusquely.

"She's a good girl, Ezra—a thorough good girl, and a rich girl, too, though her money is a small thing in my eyes compared to her virtue."

Young Girdlestone sneered. "Of course," he said, impatiently. "Well, go on—what about her?"

"Just this, Ezra, that there is no girl in the world whom I should like better to receive as my daughter-in-law. Ah! you rogue, you could come round her; you know you could." The old man poked his long bony finger in the direction of his son's ribs with grim playfulness.

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" remarked the junior partner, with a very unpleasant smile.

"Yes, that is one way out of our difficulties. She has forty thousand pounds, which would be more than enough to save the firm. At the same time you would gain a charming wife."

"If we are reduced to such an expedient I think I can answer for the result. The girl's not a bad looking one. But you said you had several plans. Let us hear some of the other ones. If the worst comes of the worst I might consent to that—on condition, of course, that I should have the whole management of the money."

"Quite so—quite so," his father said hurriedly. "That's a dear, good lad. As you say, when all other things fail we can always fall back upon that. At present I intend to raise as much money as I can upon our credit, and invest it in such a manner as to bring in a large and immediate profit."

"And how do you intend to do this?" his son asked doubtfully.

"I intend," said John Girdlestone, solemnly rising up and leaning his elbow against the mantelpiece, "I intend to make a corner in diamonds."

## CHAPTER V.

John Girdlestone pronounced his intention with such dignity and emphasis that he evidently expected the announcement to come as a surprise upon his son. If so, he was not disappointed, for the young man stared open-eyed.

"A corner in diamonds!" he repeated. "How will you do that?"

"You know what a corner is," his father explained. "If you buy up all the cotton, say, or sugar in the market, so as to have the whole of it in your own hands, and to be able to put your own price on it in selling it again—that is called making a corner in wheat or cotton. I intend to make a corner in diamonds."

"Of course, I know what a corner is," Ezra said impatiently. "But how on earth are you going to buy all the diamonds in? You would want the capital of a Rothschild."

"Not so much as you think, my boy, for there are not any great amount of diamonds in the market at any one time. The yield of the South African fields regulates the price. I have had this idea in my head for some time, and have studied the details. Of course, I should not attempt to buy in all the diamonds that are in the market. A small portion of them would yield profit enough to float the firm off again."

"But if you have only one part of the supply in your hands, how are you to regulate the market value? You must come down to the prices at which other holders are selling."

"Ha! ha! Very good! very good!" the old merchant said, shaking his head good-humoredly. "But you don't quite see my plan yet. You have not altogether grasped it. Allow me to explain to you. I did some business in diamonds myself when I was a younger man, and so I had an opportunity of observing their fluctuations in the market. Now, there is one thing which invariably depreciates the price of diamonds. That is the rumor of fresh discoveries of mines in other parts of the world. The instant such a thing gets wind the value of the stones goes down wonderfully. The discovery of diamonds in Central India not long ago had that effect very markedly, and they have never recovered their value since. Do you follow me?"

An expression of interest had come over Ezra's face, and he nodded to show that he was listening.

"(To be continued.)"

An English Amenity.

A striking difference between our manners and those of our English cousins was shown one day at a garden party. The hostess, an American, was speaking to one of her guests, an Englishwoman of rank.

"Dear Lady B.," she said, "here are some sandwiches which I made with my own hands, particularly for you. You know I've often told you about our American sandwiches and how good they are. Here are different sorts, lettuce and cucumbers, if you care for 'grass,' or if you like a savory better try the cream cheese ones with pimentos. I've some sweet ones, too, raisins and nuts chopped together—which will you try first?"

She held a plate in each hand, a plate filled with dainty looking sandwiches, and they were extended invitingly toward her guest, who looked at them critically, then said in the clear, high pitched voice of the well bred Englishwoman:

"Oh, thank you, so kind of you, but do you know I never touch the nasty things?"—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Two Lapses of Memory.

Mother—Tommy, what did I say I'd do to you if you touched that jam again?

Tommy—Why, it's funny, ma, that you should forget, too. I'm blamed if I can remember!—Philadelphia Telegraph.

Takes Its Own Gait.

"Time waits for nobody," sighed the senior partner.

"True," rejoined the junior partner, "but the office boy worries each afternoon because it will hurry for nobody."



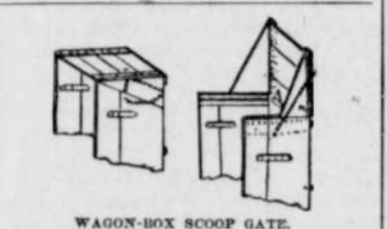
## FARMERS' CORNER.

### Alfalfa for Hogs.

At the Kansas Experiment Station hogs were fed on a ration of alfalfa hay and Kaffir corn meal. The gain was 73 per cent more on this ration than upon a ration of Kaffir corn meal alone. For every bushel of Kaffir corn meal and 7.83 pounds of alfalfa hay, the gain was 10.88 pounds, while upon Kaffir corn meal alone the gain was 7.48 pounds per bushel. It is shown that the hay gave better results when cut early and that the chief nutriment was in the leaves, which should be carefully saved during the process of harvesting. An earlier experiment at the same station was tried to determine the value of alfalfa pasture for hogs. The hogs were allowed to run upon the alfalfa during the summer and were fed a light ration of grain. After deducting the probable gain for the corn it was found that during the summer each acre of alfalfa pasture produced 776 pounds of pork.

### Scoop Gate for Wagon Box.

The end gate for a wagon box here illustrated, answers the purpose best of anything known for hauling corn or anything which is to be scooped from the wagon box. The left figure shows it closed; being fastened by a hook on each side. When ready to unload, loosen hooks, swing gate down and, as it is supported by a chain on each side, you can stand on it and com-



WAGON-BOX SCOOP GATE.

mence scooping. It is fastened to bottom of the box with strap hinges which should be sunk into box and gate so that it leaves an even surface to scoop over. The gate should be about thirty inches high and wide enough so that side boards of same will fit over outside of box as shown in right hand figure.

### Meat for Layers.

One of the best foods for making hens lay is lean meat. When the supply of eggs falls, stop all other feeds and feed lean meat or liver, and cheap meats will answer, and it will be found superior to anything else that can be used. Green bone, containing a large proportion of lean meat, is even better, provided the fat portions are removed from the bone.

It will be found cheaper than grain, because it will make eggs. One reason why the hens fail to lay when they have plenty of grain is that they require a change, and meat supplies the needful. If the hens are fat, give one ounce of lean meat each day, allowing no other food for a week or two, and watch the results.—Colman's Rural World.

### Pays to Raise White Beans.

Common white beans are a good crop for the farmer to grow, if they are grown under the best methods. Good-sized seed should be planted rather than small seed, and the planting should be after the danger of frost is past, as the leaves of beans will not stand frost. The farmer should at least raise enough for his family, which can easily be done on a very small strip of land that has been only moderately manured. This small demand for manure is due to the fact that bean plant roots have on them nodules containing bacteria which gather nitrogen from the air. White beans need food cultivation, so that the soil around the roots can be well treated, which favors the development of the nodules.

### Cleaning Drinking Vessels.

Unclean drinking vessels are doubtless the immediate means of spreading some of our contagious diseases, such as roup. Roup is a disease in which slime accumulates in the mouths of the fowls and strings out of their mouths when they open them to drink. Nothing is easier than for such a fowl to leave slime in the drinking water, which is then partaken of by the other fowls. This leads to the fowls all becoming quickly affected. As roup comes on in the fall very often when we get the changes in temperature at night, it is necessary that the drinking vessels be kept clean and every fowl that shows signs of a cold should be taken at once from the house so that it will not be possible for her to spread the disease.

### Returned to Use of Oxen.

A Missouri farmer has returned to the use of oxen on his farm. He says he finds them cheaper and better than horses and mules. In addition to having oxen for general farm work, he has trained a bull to run a treadmill that pumps water, churns butter and does all of that kind of work. This animal beats a windmill or gasoline engine "all to pieces," and the work keeps his temper sweet and prevents him from doing damage with his horns. Other farmers are watching the experiment, and "horseless farms" may soon be all the rage.

### Good Care of the Saddle.

A manufacturer of saddles is credited with the statement that one of the best of polishes for riding saddles and bridles is new milk. This should not be rubbed in the leather, however, until the latter has been cleaned with slightly warm water and soap. Hard-working stock saddles can be kept in good condition by thoroughly rubbing with three parts of palm oil and one of neatsfoot after first washing with soap and water. For the leather lining of saddles that comes next to the horse there is nothing so good as neatsfoot oil. The salt which exudes from the animal's body is very hard on the leather. Vigorous and protracted rubbing of the leather is essential, whatever dressing is used.

### Using Commercial Fertilizers.

The pure nitrate of soda, muriate of potash, super-phosphate or ground bone, can be used in the garden, but unless a person has had experience of handles these very carefully, results are apt to be disappointing or disastrous. Plants of which the leaf or stalk are the edible portions must have plenty of nitrogen, which is available in the guano and animal manure. When the roots or fruits are to be eaten, phosphoric acid should be added in the shape of wood ashes or super phosphate. Ground bone is too slow in becoming available.

### Early Layers.

Frequently a pullet starts laying before the others and continues to lay well all the year; such a one should be carefully watched and her eggs saved, providing sufficient size was attained before she began laying. Other pullets will lay a few eggs in the autumn and then cease until spring; these should, of course, be discarded. Those that begin laying prematurely are not desirable, as they should attain the size characteristic of their breed before commencing, and then lay continuously during the rest of the fall and winter.

### An Acre of Land.

To measure an acre tie a ring at each end of a rope, the distance being just 66 feet between them; tie a piece of colored cloth exactly in the middle of this. One acre of ground will be four times the length and two and one-half times the width, or the equal of 10 rods one way and 40 rods the other, making the full acre 160 square rods. Keep the rope dry, so it will not stretch. A rod is 16 1/2 lineal feet. An acre is 4,840 square yards or 43,560 square feet.

### A Good Condition Powder.

Dr. Smead advises the following condition powder for live stock: Two pounds of ground flaxseed as a base, in which mix 5 ounces powdered gentian, 6 ounces of ginger, 4 ounces of powdered sulphate of iron, 4 ounces of powdered nitrate of potash. To this add 2 ounces of powdered charcoal and 1 pound of common salt. Mix all well together. Give at first two tablespoonfuls in feed of grain twice a day. After two weeks give half the quantity.

### Purple-Top Ruta-Baga.

Prof. Rane of the New Hampshire station recommends the American purple top ruta-baga for the following reasons: It is a fine market sort, often selling in the markets for double the price of the early white turnip. It is also a splendid keeper and is usually free from all spogginess. While it cannot be planted as late as the early turnips, it can be used as a follow crop after early peas, provided the seed is sown not later than July 10.

### Angle Iron for Posts.

Angle iron is being used for making fence posts with great success. One of the valuable features is that a post of this description may be driven in place by a heavy mallet, and digging is, therefore, unnecessary. A non-climbable fence is made by bending the post so that there is an overhang of twelve or eighteen inches, with the wires strung regularly in the very top. The difficulty of climbing such a fence will be apparent at a glance.

### Cows Differ.

In their milk producing power cows differ all the way from 3,000 pounds of milk per year to 12,000 pounds a year. That being true, why should farmers be satisfied to keep a cow that will produce but ten pounds of milk (about five quarts) per day for 300 days?

### Avoid This Kind of Pail.

The use of the strainer in a pail where the dirt which falls into the opening is likely to be driven through by the succeeding streams of milk is not desirable. Its use tends to increase the germ contents of the milk and injure its keeping quality.

### Get Some New Roosters.

The outlay attending the purchase of new breeding males will be well repaid by results. Do not practice inbreeding if you want your stock to do well.

### Notes of the Farm.

The feed problem is getting harder. There is no excuse for the filthy hog pen. The more succulent the feed the better it is for sheep.

### Be a Good Farmer if You are Going to be a Farmer at All.

Clean and sort your seeds and thus insure larger and better crops. Water, pure and plenty of it, should be provided for the dairy cows. Young stock should be thrifty to return a profit. Keep them growing. Teach the boys to be gentle with the cows. It is better for the cows, and the boys, too.

# THE WEEKLY HISTORIAN



- 1655—Cromwell dissolved Parliament.
- 1696—France declared war against England.
- 1677—Arrival of royal commissioners to investigate the causes of the rebellion in Virginia.
- 1712—Conference for peace opened at Utrecht.
- 1766—Benjamin Franklin examined in the House of Commons respecting the stamp act.
- 1775—Second provincial Congress met at Cambridge, Mass.
- 1778—France acknowledged independence of the United States... Burgoyne's army denied embarkation at Boston.
- 1781—Gen. Greene took command of Morgan's army.
- 1807—Pall Mall, London, lighted with gas—the first street of any city so illuminated.
- 1810—Guadaloupe surrendered to the British.
- 1811—The famous Boll Rock lighthouse, off the coast of Scotland, first lighted.
- 1813—Spanish Cortes abolished the inquisition.
- 1830—Independence of Greece declared by the allied powers.
- 1834—Richard Lawrence attempted to assassinate President Andrew Jackson.
- 1836—Alpaca wool first introduced into England.
- 1847—Lord Elgin reached Montreal and took the oath of office as governor of Canada.
- 1852—State house at Columbus, Ohio, destroyed by fire.
- 1856—Chilean war steamer Cudox Casadempe wrecked, with loss of 318 lives.
- 1859—James Francis Smith, governor general of the Philippine Islands, born at San Francisco.
- 1861—Kansas admitted to the Union.
- 1862—The ironclad "Monitor" launched.
- 1863—Confederate gunboats attacked blockading squadron at entrance to Charleston harbor.
- 1865—Gen. Sherman left Savannah on his northward march.
- 1868—United States Congress exempted cotton from the internal revenue tax.
- 1870—Steamer City of Boston sailed from Halifax for Glasgow with 191 souls on board and was never heard of again.
- 1871—Paris surrendered to the Germans after a siege of 131 days.
- 1878—The Russians occupied Kazan.
- 1880—Three million dollar fire in Buffalo, N. Y.
- 1892—Supreme Court decided Nebraska governorship contest in favor of James E. Boyd, Democrat.
- 1895—Japanese captured Wei-Hai-Wei from the Chinese.
- 1898—Great strike of engineers in England came to an end.
- 1902—Anglo-Japanese treaty signed.
- 1906—Frederick VIII. proclaimed King of Denmark.

## Handicrafts for Farmers.

The editor of the Craftsman in the current number proposes that the federal government aid in bringing about a much needed reform in the industrial system of the United States by extending the work of the Department of Commerce so as to assist small farmers in developing home arts and crafts and assist them in finding a market for the products of such craftsmanship. The editor takes pains to say that in this appeal for government recognition of handicrafts allied with agriculture he is not considering the so-called "arts and crafts" movement as it appeals to the leisure class. What he has in mind is practically to encourage mechanical industries as a means of correcting the evils of the factory system, doing away with the menace of the unemployed and relieving the congestion in our cities. He refers to the official encouragement of such crafts in Hungary, and to the remarkable success resulting therefrom. He believes that President Roosevelt has taken an important step in this direction by his recommendation that both State and national governments should encourage the growth of institutional and social movements among farmers. It is not contemplated that this development of handicrafts in the home would ever take the place of the machine, but that it would open the door of opportunity to many individuals starving for self-expression apart from the routine of either farm or factory. The principal field for home crafts would seem to be in producing sensible rugs, furniture, pottery and any of the things that enter into the life of the home.

## McCurdy Laughs at Suits.

Richard A. McCurdy, former president of the Mutual Life Insurance Company, who has spent two years in Europe, recently returned to his home in Morris-town, N. J. When asked about the suits for restitution of several million dollars which the management of his old company has brought against him, he laughed and said: "I have lawyers and they will take care of the suits. They are not worth talking about. I am 73 years old. The real question is which will last the longest, the suits or myself."