

The Firm of Girdlestone

A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

"I am sorry to be late, mother," the lad said, kissing the old lady. "I have been down at the docks all day, and have been busy and worried."

Mrs. Dimsdale was sitting in her chair beside the fire knitting when her son came in. At the sound of his voice she glanced anxiously up at his face, with all her motherly instincts on the alert.

"What is it, my boy?" she said. "You don't look yourself. Something has gone wrong with you. Surely you're not keeping anything secret from your old mother."

"Don't be so foolish as that, my boy," said the doctor earnestly. "If you have anything on your mind, out with it. There's nothing so far wrong but that it can be set right, I'll be bound."

Thus pressed, their son told them all that had happened, the rumor which he had heard from Von Baumser at the Cock and Cowslip, and the subsequent visit to Eccleston square. "I can hardly realize it all yet," he said in conclusion. "My head seems to be in a whirl, and I can't reason about it."

The old couple listened very attentively to his narrative, and were silent some little time after he had finished. His mother first broke the silence. "I was always sure," she said, "that we were wrong to stop our correspondence at the request of Mr. Girdlestone."

"It's easy enough to say that now," said Tom ruefully. "At the time it seemed as if we had no alternative."

"There's no use crying over spilt milk," remarked the old physician, who had been very grave during his son's narrative. "We must set to work and get things right again. There is one thing very certain, Tom, and that is that Kate Harston is a girl who never did or could do a dishonorable thing. If she said that she would wait for you, my boy, you may feel perfectly safe; and if you doubt her for one moment you ought to be deuced well ashamed of yourself."

"Well said, governor!" cried Tom, with beaming face. "Now that is exactly my own feeling, but there is so much to be explained. Why, have they left London, and where have they gone to?"

"No doubt that old scoundrel Girdlestone thought that your patience would soon come to an end, so he got the start of you by carrying the girl off into the country."

"And if he has done this, what can I do?"

"Nothing. It is entirely within his right to do it."

"And have her stowed away in some little cottage in the country, with that brute Ezra Girdlestone hanging round her all the time. It is the thought of that that drives me wild."

"You trust in her, my boy," said the old doctor. "We'll try our best in the meantime to find out where she has gone to. If she is unhappy or needs a friend you may be sure that she will write to your mother."

"Yes, there is always that hope," exclaimed Tom, in a more cheerful voice. "To-morrow I may learn something at the office."

"Don't make the mistake of quarreling with the Girdlestons. After all they are within their rights in doing what they appear to have done."

"They may be within their legal rights," Tom cried indignantly, "but the old man made a deliberate compact with me, which he has broken."

"Never mind. Don't give them an advantage by losing your temper." The doctor chatted away over the matter for some time, and his words, together with those of his mother, cheered the young fellow's heart. Nevertheless, the old doctor continued to be very thoughtful and very grave. "I don't like it," he said, more than once. "I don't like the idea of the poor girl being left entirely in the hands of that pair of beauties."

CHAPTER XIV.

John Girdlestone and his ward were at Waterloo station. He gave orders to the guard that the luggage should be stamped, but took care that she should not hear the name of their destination. Hurrying her rapidly down the platform amid the confused heaps of luggage and currents of eager passengers, he pushed her into a first-class carriage, and sprang after her just as the bell rang and the wheels began to revolve.

They were alone. Kate crouched up into the corner among the cushions and wrapped her rug round her, for it was bitterly cold. The merchant pulled a note book from his pocket, and proceeded by the light of the lamp above him to add up columns of figures. He sat very upright in his seat, and appeared to be absorbed in his work as though he were among his papers in Fenchurch street. He neither glanced at his companion nor made any inquiry as to her comfort.

As she sat opposite to him she could not keep her eyes from his hard, angular face, every rugged feature of which was exaggerated by the flickering yellow light above him. Those deep-set eyes and sunken cheeks had been familiar to her for years. How was it that they now, for the first time, struck her as being terrible? Was it that new expression which had appeared upon them, that hard, inexorable set about the mouth, which gave a more sinister character to his whole face? As she gazed at him an ineffable loathing and dread rose in her soul, and she could have shrieked out of pure terror. She put her hand up to her throat with a gasp to keep down the sudden inclination to cry out. As she did so her guardian glanced over the top of the note

book with his piercing light grey eyes. "Don't get hysterical!" he cried. "You have given us trouble enough without that."

"Oh, why are you so harsh?" she cried, throwing out her arms towards him in eloquent entreaty, while the tears coursed down her cheeks. "What have I done that is so dreadful? I could not love your son, and I do love another. I am so grieved to have offended you. You used to be kind and like a father to me."

"And a nice return you have made me. I have to blame myself to some extent for having allowed you to go on that most perilous trip to Scotland, where you were thrown into the company of this young adventurer by his scheming old father."

"You may say what you like of me," she said bitterly. "I suppose that is one of your privileges as my guardian. You have no right, however, to speak evil of my friends."

"You are becoming impertinent," he answered, and resumed his calculations in his note book. Kate covered back into her corner again, while the train thundered and screeched and rattled through the darkness. Looking through the steamy window nothing was to be seen save the twinkling here and there of the lights of the scattered country cottages. Occasionally a red signal lamp would glare down upon her like the bloodshot eye of some demon who presided over this kingdom of iron and steam. Far behind a lurid trail of smoke marked the way that they had come. To Kate's mind it was all as weird and gloomy and cheerless even as the thoughts within her.

And they were gloomy enough. Where was she going? How long was she going for? What was she to do when there? On all these points she was absolutely ignorant. What was the object of this sudden flight from London? Her guardian could have separated her from the Dimsdales in many less elaborate ways than this. Could it be that he intended some system of pressure and terrorism by which she should be forced to accept Ezra as a suitor? She clenched her little white teeth as she thought of it, and registered a vow that nothing in this world would ever bring her to give in upon that point. There was only one bright spot in her outlook. When she reached her destination she would at once write to Mrs. Dimsdale, tell her where she was, and ask her frankly for an explanation of their sudden silence. How much wiser if she had done so before. Only a foolish pride had withheld her from it.

The train had already stopped at one large junction. Looking out through the window she saw by the lamps that it was Guildford. After another interminable interval of clattering and tossing and plunging through the darkness, they came to a second station of importance, Petersfield. "We are nearing our destination," Girdlestone remarked, shutting up his book.

This proved to be a small wayside station, illuminated by a single lamp, which gave no information as to the name. They were the only passengers who alighted, and the train rolled on for Portsmouth, leaving them with their trunks upon the dark and narrow platform. It was a dark night with a bitter wind which carried with it a suspicion of dampness, which might have been rain, or might have been the drift of the neighboring ocean. Kate was numb with the cold, and even her gaunt companion stamped his feet and shivered as he looked about him.

"I telegraphed for a trap," said he to the guard. "Is there not one waiting?"

"Yes, sir, if you be Mister Girdlestone. Here, Carver, here's your gentleman."

At this summons a rough-looking oster emerged into the circle of light thrown by the single lamp, and touching his hat, announced in a surly voice that he was the individual in question. The guard and he then proceeded to drag the trunks to the vehicle. It was a small wagonette, with a high seat for the driver in front.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver, when the travelers had taken their seats.

"To Hampton Priory. Do you know where that is?"

"Better'n two mile from here, and close to the railway line," said the man. "There hasn't been no one livin' there for two year at the least."

"We are expected and all will be ready for us," said Girdlestone. "Go as fast as you can, for we are cold." The driver cracked his whip, and the horse started at a brisk trot down the dark country road.

Looking round her Kate saw that they were passing through a large country village, consisting of a broad main street, with a few insignificant offshoots branching away on either side. A church stood on one side, and on the other the village inn. The door was open and the light shining through the red curtains of the bar parlor looked warm and cosy. The murmur of cheerful voices sounded from within. Kate as she looked across felt doubly cheerless and lonely by the contrast. Girdlestone looked, too, but with different emotions.

The road was lined on either side by high hedges, which threw a dense shadow over everything. The feeble lamps of the wagonette bored two little yellow tunnels of light on either side. The man let the reins lie loose upon the horse's back, and the animal picked out the roadway for itself. As they swung round from the narrow lane on to a broader road Kate broke out into a little cry of pleasure.

"There's the sea," she exclaimed joyfully. The moon had broken from behind the clouds, and glittered on the vast silvery expanse.

"Yes, that's the sea," the driver said, "and them lights down yonder is at Lea Claxton, where the fisher folk live; and over there," pointing with his whip to a long dark shadow on the waters, "is the 'Oilywote'."

"The what?"

"The Isle of Wight, he means," said Girdlestone.

The driver looked at him reproachfully. "Of course," said he, "if you Lunnon folks knows more about it than we who are born and bred in the place, it's no matter o' use our tryin' to teach you."

With this sarcastic comment he withdrew into himself, and refused to utter another word until the end of their journey.

It was not long before this was attained. Passing down a deeply rutted lane they came to a high stone wall which extended for a couple of hundred yards. It had a crumbling, decaying appearance, as far as could be judged in the uncertain light. This wall was broken by a single iron gate, flanked by two high pillars

each of which was surmounted by some weather-beaten heraldic device. Passing through they turned up a winding avenue, with lines of trees on either side, which shot their branches so thickly above them that they might have been driving through some sombre tunnel. This avenue terminated in an open space, in the midst of which towered a great irregular white-washed building, which was the old Priory. All below it was swathed in darkness, but the upper windows caught the glint of the moon, and emitted a pallid and sickly glimmer. The whole effect was so weird and gloomy that Kate felt her heart sink within her. The wagonette pulled up in front of the door, and Girdlestone assisted her to alight.

"There had been no lights or any symptoms of welcome, but as they pulled down the trunks the door opened and a little old woman appeared with a candle in her hand, which she carefully shaded from the wind while she peered out into the darkness."

"Is that Mr. Girdlestone?" she cried. "Of course it is," the merchant said impatiently. "Did I not telegraph and tell you that I was coming?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, hobbling forward with the light. "And this is the young lady? Come in, my dear; come in. We have not got things very smart yet, but they will soon come right."

She led the way through a lofty hall into a large sitting room, which, no doubt had been the monkish refectory in bygone days. It looked very bleak and cold now, although a small fire sputtered and sparkled in the corner of the great iron grate. There was a pan upon the fire, and the deal table in the center of the room was laid out roughly as for a meal. The candle, which the old woman had carried in, was the only light, though the flickering fire cast strange fantastic shadows in the further corners and among the great oaken rafters which formed the ceiling.

"Come up to the fire, my dear," said the old woman. "Take off your cloak and warm yourself." She held her own shriveled arms towards the blaze, as though her short exposure to the night air had chilled her. Glancing at her, Kate saw that her face was sharp-featured and cunning, with a loose lower lip which exposed a line of yellow teeth, and a chin which bristled with a tuft of long grey hairs.

From without there came the crunching of gravel as the wagonette turned and rattled down the avenue. Kate listened to the sound of the wheels until they died away in the distance. They seemed somehow to be the last link which bound her to the human race. Her heart failed her completely, and she burst into tears.

"What's the matter then?" the old woman asked, looking up at her. "What are ye crying about?"

"Oh, I am so miserable and so lonely," she cried. "What have I done that I should be so unhappy? Why should I be taken to this horrible, horrible place?"

"What's the matter with the place?" asked her withered companion, "I don't see nought amiss with it. Here's Mr. Girdlestone a-comin'. He don't grumble at the place, I warrant."

The merchant was not in the best of tempers, for he had had an altercation with the driver about the fare, and was cold into the bargain. "At it again," he said roughly, as he entered. "It is I who ought to weep, I think, who have been put to all this trouble and inconvenience by your disobedience and weakness of mind."

Kate did not answer, but sat upon a coarse deal chair beside the fire, and buried her face in her hands. All manner of vague fears and fancies filled her mind. What was Tom doing now? How quickly he would fly to her rescue did he but know how strangely she was situated. She determined that her very first action next morning should be to write to Mrs. Dimsdale, and to tell her, not only where she was, but all that had occurred. The reflection that she could do this cheered her heart, and she managed to eat a little of the supper which the old woman had now placed upon the table. It was a rough stew of some sort, but the long journey had given an edge to their appetites, and the merchant, though usually epicurean in his tastes, ate a hearty meal.

(To be continued.)

A Nice Calculation.

A Flemish gentleman conceived the idea that he would only live a certain time, so he made a nice calculation of his fortune, which he so apportioned as to last just the same period as he guessed his life would extend to. Strangely enough, his calculations came correct to the letter, for he died punctually at the time he had previously reckoned. He had so far exhausted his estate that after his debts had been discharged a solitary pair of slippers represented the entire property he left. His relatives buried him, and a representation of the slippers was carried on the tomb. To-day in a churchyard at Amsterdam his grave may be seen, the only inscription on the stone being two Flemish words, "Effen Nyt" (i. e., "Exactly").

As It Seemed to Him.

"Some people," remarked the demoralizer, "never seem to be around when wanted."

"Well," rejoined the moralizer, "it is better to be absent when wanted than to be present when you are not wanted."

Cupid's Patient.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the young lady in the big furniture store. "What a queer looking sofa! Why, it has such queer legs!"

"Yes, miss," replied the polite salesman, "that is a courtship sofa. Little brothers can't squeeze under it."

Long Reach.

Gunner—Many of our singers go over to Europe to reach the high C's.

Guy—Well, what do the European singers come over here for?

Gunner—Oh, they come over here to reach the X's and V's.

Willing to Elope.

Said She—If we appear together so much people will talk about us.

Said He—Well, suppose we disappear together.

FARMS AND FARMERS

The Influence of Feed.
Linsed meal has a tendency to make a soft butter, provided the meal is fed in large amounts. If fed in only medium amounts, the butter fats are normal. It is a valuable milk-stimulating food and can be used to prevent the formation of excessively hard fats in winter. The only disadvantage to the general use is the price. Half or three-quarters of a pound of linsed or oil meal in a ration per day will exert a very favorable influence upon the quality of the butter.

Corn meal, when fed in large amounts with coarse fodders, has a tendency to produce a firm butter. When mixed with other grains, a better quality of butter is produced than if the corn were fed alone. Gluten meal, a by-product obtained in the manufacture of corn starch and glucose, produces a softer butter than corn meal. The gluten, it is to be observed, contains more of the vital nutrient, protein.—Professor Harry Snyder, University of Minnesota.

Keeping a Gate from Sagging.
Most farm gates are heavy, and after a little time they sag. When they get this way it takes a strong man to open and shut one. Here is a remedy. Get a wheel, either big or little, from an old piece of machinery, and bolt it to the front end of the gate

in such a way that the gate will be held level. Now the smallest child can open the gate for you. Try it, for it is a saver—saves your patience, your back, and the gate.—N. W. S., in Farm and Home.

Robins Killed for Food in the South.
A million robins were killed in Louisiana during the winter of 1907-8, the offenders being men and boys who shot them for food. While they are protected as song birds in Northern States, it is a common Southern practice to shoot them for the table, and in some States the hunters kill them in great numbers at their roosting places. A government expert suggests that the eastward movement of the boll weevil has been facilitated by the killing of the robins. If that is shown to be so, the cotton growers will not receive much sympathy from the members of the Audubon societies.—Leslie's Weekly.

Transplanting Trees.
In Revue Universelle, according to another foreign contemporary, there is a practical article of general interest on transplanting plants in full foliage at night. The results of some experiments by Renault would make unnecessary the customary transplanting of deciduous trees in the fall or winter. He has found that trees may be transplanted in full foliage in May or June, with little or no injury, providing the process is carried on at night. This has been demonstrated to the entire satisfaction of some of the most prominent horticulturists of France.

Brewery Stock Feed.
Dried brewers' grains rank close to bran in feeding value, containing a little more protein and fat, but not quite so much carbohydrates. It is claimed that in 100 pounds of this feed there are 15.7 pounds of protein, 36.3 pounds of carbohydrates and 5.1 pounds of fat. Malt sprouts and dried brewers' grains are valuable cow feeds, especially the latter. Sprouts are richest in protein, but not much relished by cows and should be fed only in limited quantities. Wet brewers' grains are apt to injure the quality of the milk.

Population and Food.
The statistician in the Department of Agriculture of the United States estimates that in 1931 the population of the country will be 130,000,000. To supply the requirements of this number of people will necessitate the production of 700,000,000 bushels of wheat, 1,250,000,000 bushels of oats, 3,450,000,000 bushels of corn, 100,000,000 tons of hay; and cotton, tobacco, fruits and vegetables in proportion. This will necessitate bringing under cultivation an additional 150,000,000 acres of land, and it is estimated that we have only 108,000,000 acres available for cultivation.

Insect with Springboard Nose.
Among the curious insects of the Malay Peninsula is one called the lantern fly, which is remarkable for its sudden leaps, made without the aid of its wings. It was only after the first specimens of this queer insect were carried to London for examination, that it was discovered that a curious projection on the front of its head, a kind of nose with a crease in it, was the leaping organ. When bent back under the abdomen and suddenly released it sent the insect flying.

Good Use for an Old Flow Wheel.
In such a way that the gate will be held level. Now the smallest child can open the gate for you. Try it, for it is a saver—saves your patience, your back, and the gate.—N. W. S., in Farm and Home.

Digested Fertilizers.
Manure is simply materials that have been softened and decomposed (digested) within the body of an animal. To apply such raw materials as bran and linsed meal directly to the soil would be of no advantage, notwithstanding that they are excellent fertilizers, their value being increased by feeding to stock.

To Prevent Runaways.
An iron weight with a strap attached to it should always be carried in the farm wagon. The moment the horse is stopped and the driver is to leave the team, the weight should be dropped to the ground and the strap fastened to the horse. This will make it safer than to allow the team to stand unhitched.

Demand for Horse-Radish.
Annually 75,000 barrels, or 7,500,000 pounds, of horse-radish are shipped from St. Louis to the Atlantic coast, to the Pacific coast, to the lakes and to the Gulf.

Farm News and Notes.
Uncle Sam received \$11,500,000 last year for public lands of all kinds.

A gardener at Tacoma, Wash., last season marketed \$750 worth of celery from one acre of ground.

The explosion of a cream separator nearly killed Earl Adams and his mother, living near Trempealeau, Minn.

Emperor William of Germany sent fifteen coach and cavalry horses to the International show. They were among the most beautiful animals ever seen in this country.

Wyoming is sending a large number of her tough little bronchos to Alaska, as it has been found that they stand the rigorous climate up there better than any other breed.

Night riders in Tennessee who were arrested for burning tobacco sheds and shooting at farmers were set free because a jury could not be found in the county to try them.

The government reports that 2,900,000 cattle died in the United States last year, over half of these succumbing from exposure. The total losses from all causes is estimated at \$24,000,000.

Farming in New Mexico has been given a great impetus during the past few years by the work of the farmers' institutes and many unproductive valleys have been turned into rich grain and fruit fields.

One of the sights at the International Stock Show was a pure white Galloway, sired by Scottish Standard, a thoroughbred Galloway bull out of a pure bred white Galloway cow. This is a freak, but may produce a new type of Galloway.

Self-Preservation.
"The man who can be coerced into paying hush money is either a coward or a criminal."

"I don't class myself with either and I pay hush money."

"What for?"

"If I didn't my wife would talk me from one pay day till the next."—Houston Post.

Helpful Hint.
"What would be a good motto for a young author?" asked the youth with dreams.

"First, be sure you typewrite and then go ahead," replied the reader from Punkton's publishing house.—Kansas City Times.

One thing may be said to the credit of the parrot: He never makes any thing worse in repeating it.

Other tender-hearted women have attempted to lighten the burden of draught horses with varying degrees of success, but it has remained for Mrs. Theodore Thomas, wife of the great orchestra leader, to hit on a practical remedy for the evil. She is taking steps to submit to the city council of Chicago a mammoth petition for an ordinance regulating the tonnage a horse may be required to draw. It is her hope that the full legal penalty may be attached to the measure, and that it will be enforced. She realizes that, while a good many owners of horses might be influenced by arguments based on sentiment, there are hundreds who can be reached only through their pockets. If she can make it expensive for an owner to overload a wagon, she thinks she will be able to save the four-footed animals many a weary task.

Mrs. Thomas does not content herself with having her petition signed by leading citizens. She goes every day among the teamsters themselves and, by simple reasoning, induces them to add their names to the plea. Her argument is that it is to the teamster's interest to see that his horse is not overtasked, because he then will be able to do his own work much more quickly and so, in time, command higher wages. Many hundreds of teamsters have given their signatures to the earnest woman, and she expects to have the names of a fair proportion of the owners on the sheet before she takes it to the council.

An Old-Fashioned Tanner.
A Pleasure Foregone.
Have you studied political economy?
"No, sir," answered Senator Sorghum. "I'd like to, but I'm afraid my constituents would think I was amusing myself reading books instead of hustling for pensions and appropriations."
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GREATEST PORT IN FRANCE

Commerce of Paris Has Annually Been Growing in Importance.

Paris will soon be the greatest port in France. Work which was begun thirty-seven years ago is now nearing completion and when this is done the gay capital will have many miles of wharves capable of landing thousands of tons of merchandise daily. Although the port is mostly concerned with internal traffic, the Seine at Paris is also deep enough to receive ships coming direct from London. Her commerce of this nature has annually been growing in importance.

Shortly after the war of 1870 the Paris Municipal Council decided to establish wharves along the river banks so that boat traffic could be more rapidly developed. A vast plan of improvement was then laid out. The river was dredged. Locks were established both above and below the city, so as to maintain the river at a nearly constant level. Then a series of docks was established, some of which were large enough to take Channel steamers of moderate tonnage. Such steamers are now a familiar sight at the Port St. Nicholas, just opposite the Louvre.

The chief feature of the shipping which has Paris as its home port is stone, plaster and other building material. Huge quantities of cereals and wine are also handled. Among the things which Paris ships to the provinces by way of the Seine is refuse derived from old buildings which have been torn down, and such unattractive material as chemical manures and so forth.

During the year 1906 almost 13,000,000 tons were shipped from Paris. Last year's record surpassed this by another half million. When the present improvements are completed it is believed that the annual tonnage will be almost doubled. Practically all the ground removed in excavating for the city's new underground railroad was carried away by Seine boats. All the material used in its construction came by the same route.

The only port which at present surpasses Paris in annual tonnage is Marseilles, and within the next few months even Marseilles will have to take second place.

Humane Work That Is Practical.
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