

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

Another moment and the door was stealthily opened. Once again the broad golden bar shot out across the lawn almost to the spot where the confederates were crouching. In the center of the zone of light there stood a figure—the figure of the girl. Even at that distance they could distinguish the pearl-grey mantle which she usually wore and the close-fitting bonnet. She had wrapped a shawl round the lower part of her face to protect her from the boisterous wind. For a minute or more she stood peering into the darkness of the night, as though uncertain whether to proceed or to go back. Then, with a quick, sudden gesture she closed the door behind her. The light was no longer there, but they knew that she was outside the house, and that the appointment would be kept.

What an age it seemed before they heard her footsteps. She came very slowly, putting one foot gingerly before the other, as if afraid of falling over something in the darkness. Once or twice she stopped altogether, looking round, no doubt, to make sure of her whereabouts. At the instant the moon shone out from behind a cloud, and they saw her dark figure a short distance off. The light enabled her to see the withered oak, for she came rapidly towards it. As she approached she satisfied herself apparently that she was the first on the ground, for she slackened her pace, once more and walked in the listless way that people assume when they are waiting. The clouds were overtaking the moon again, and the light was getting dimmer.

"I can see her still," said Ezra in a whisper, grasping his father's wrist in his excitement.

The old man said nothing, but he peered through the darkness with eager, straining eyes.

"There she is, standing out a little from the oak," the young merchant said, pointing with a quivering finger. "She's not near enough for him to reach her."

"He's coming out from the shadow now," the other said huskily. "Don't you see him crawling along the ground?"

"I see him," returned the other in the same subdued, awestruck voice. "Now he has stopped; now he goes on again! He is close behind her! She is looking the other way."

A thin ray of light shot down between the clouds. In its silvery radiance two figures stood out hard and black, that of the unconscious girl and of the man who crouched like a beast of prey behind her. He made a step forward, which brought him within a yard of her. She may have heard the heavy footfall above the shriek of the storm, for she turned suddenly and faced him. At the same instant she was struck down with a crashing blow. There was no time for a prayer, no time for a scream. One moment had seen her a magnificent woman in all the pride of her youthful beauty, the next left her a poor battered senseless wreck. The navy had earned his blood money.

At the sound of the blow and the sight of the fall both the old man and the young ran out from their place of concealment. But was standing over the body, his bludgeon in his hand.

"Not even a groan," he said. "What do you think of that?"

Girdlestone wrung his hand and contemplated him warmly. "Shall I light the lantern?" he asked.

"Don't," Ezra said earnestly.

"I had no idea that you were so faint-hearted, my son," the merchant remarked. "However, I know the way to the gate well enough to go there blindfold. What a comfort it is to know that there is no blood about! That's the advantage of a stick over a knife."

"You're correct there, gov'nor," Burt said, approvingly.

"Will you kindly carry one end and I'll take the other. I'll go first, if you don't mind, because I know the way best. The train will pass in less than half an hour, so we have not long to wait. Within that time every chance of detection will have gone."

Girdlestone raised up the head of the murdered girl, and Burt took her feet. Ezra walked behind as though he were in some dreadful dream. He had fully recognized the necessity for the murder, but he had never before realized how ghastly the details would be. Already he had begun to repent that he had ever acquiesced in it. Then came thoughts of the splendid possibilities of the African business, which could only be saved from destruction by this woman's death. How could he, with his luxurious tastes, bear the squalor and poverty which would be his lot were the firm to fail. Better a rope and a long drop than such a life as that! All these considerations thronged into his mind as he blundered along the slippery footpath which led through the forest to the wooden gate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

When Tom and the major arrived at Waterloo station, the latter in a breathless condition, they found the German waiting for them with his two fellow exiles. The gentleman of Nihilistic proclivities was somewhat tall and thin, with a long frock coat buttoned almost up to his throat, which showed signs of giving at the seams every here and there. His grizzled hair fell over his collar behind, and he had a short bristling beard. He stood with one hand stuck into the front of his coat and the other upon his hip, as though rehearsing the position in which his statue would be some day erected in the streets of his native Russia, when the people had their own, and despotism was no more. In spite of his worn attire there was something noble and striking

about the man. His bow, when Baumer introduced him to the major and Tom, would have graced any court in Europe. Round his neck he had a coarse string from which hung a pair of double eyeglasses. These he fixed upon his aquiline nose, and took a good look at the gentleman whom he had come to serve.

Bulow, of Kiel, was a small, dark-eyed clean shaven fellow, quick and energetic in his movements, having more the appearance of a Celt than of a Teuton. He seemed to be full of amiability, and assured the major in execrable English how very happy he was to be able to do a service to one who had shown kindness to their esteemed colleague and persecuted patriot, Von Baumer. Indeed both of the men showed great deference to the German, and the major began to perceive that his friend was a very exalted individual in socialistic circles. He liked the look of the two foreigners, and congratulated himself upon having their co-operation in the matter on hand.

Ill luck was in store for the expedition, however. On inquiry at the ticket office they found that there was no train for upwards of two hours, and then it was a slow one, which would not land them until eight o'clock at Bedsworth. At this piece of information Tom Dimsdale fairly broke down, and stamped about the station, raving and beseeching the officials to run a special, be the cost what it might. This, however, could by no means be done, owing to the press of Saturday traffic. There was nothing for it but to wait. The three foreigners went off in search of something to eat, and having found a convenient cook shop they disappeared therein and feasted royally at Von Baumer's expense. Major Tobias Clutterbuck remained with the young man, who resolutely refused to leave the platform. The major knew of a snug little corner not far off where he could have put in the time very comfortably, but he could not bring himself to desert his companion even for a minute.

Indeed, it was well that day that young Dimsdale had good friends at his back. His appearance was so strange and wild that the passers-by turned back to have another look at him. His eyes were open and staring, giving a fear-inspiring character to his expression. He could not sit still for an instant, but paced up and down and backwards and forwards under the influence of the fierce energy which consumed him, while the major plodded along manfully at his side, suggesting every consideration which might cheer him up, and narrating many tales, true and apocryphal, most of which fell upon heedless ears.

Ezra Girdlestone had four hours' start of them. That was the thought which rankled in Tom's heart and outweighed every other consideration. He knew Kate's nature so well that he was convinced that she would never have expressed such fears to Mrs. Scully unless she had very assured reasons for them. In fact, apart from her own words, what could this secrecy and seclusion mean except foul play? After what he had learned about the insurance of the ships and the manner in which the elder Girdlestone had induced him to cease corresponding with Kate, he could believe anything of his employers. He knew, also, that in case of Kate's death the money reverted to her guardian. There was not a single link missing in the chain of evidence which showed that a crime was in contemplation. Then, who was that butcher-like man whom Ezra was taking down with him?

The major has put it on record that those two hours appeared to him the longest that ever he passed in his life, and Tom, no doubt, would indorse the sentiment. Everything must have an end, however, and the station clock, the hands of which seemed several times to have stopped altogether, began at last to approach the hour at which the Portsmouth train was timed to depart. Baumer and his two friends had come back, all three smoking cigarettes, and looking the better for their visit to the cookshop. The five got into a first-class railway carriage and waited. Would they never have done examining tickets and stamping luggage and going through all sorts of tedious formalities? At last comes the shrill whistle of the guard, the answering snort from the engine, and they are fairly started upon their mission of rescue.

There was much to be arranged as to their plan of action. Tom, Von Baumer and the major talked it over in a low voice, while the two socialists chatted together in German and consumed eternal cigarettes. Tom was for marching straight up to the Priory, and demanding that Girdlestone should deliver his ward up to them. To the major and the German this seemed an unwise proceeding. It was to put themselves hopelessly wrong from a legal point of view. Girdlestone had only to say, as he assuredly would, that the old story was a ridiculous mare's nest, and then what proof could they adduce, or what excuse give for their interference? However plausible their suspicions might be, they were, after all, only suspicions, which other people might not view in as grave a light as they did.

"What would you advise, then?" Tom asked, passing his hand over his heated forehead.

"I'll tell you now," the old soldier answered, "and I think me friend Von Baumer will agree with me. I understand that this place is surrounded by a wall to which there is only one gate. Sure we shall wait outside this wall, and one of us can go in as a skirminisher and find out how the land lies. Let him ascertain from the young lady herself if she requires immediate help, and what she would wish done. If he can't make his way to her, let him hang about the house, and see and hear all that he can. We shall then have something solid to work on. I have a whistle here on me watch chain. Our skirminisher could take that with him, and if he wants immediate help one blow of it would be enough to bring the four of us over to him. Though how the devil I am to get over a wall," concluded the major, ruefully, looking down at his own proportions, "is more than I can tell."

"I hope, my friends," said Von Baumer, "that you will allow me the honor of going first."

"That is my place," said Tom with decision.

It was nearly eight o'clock by the time they reached their destination. The station master directed them to the Flying Bull, where they secured the very vehicle in which Kate and her guardian had been originally driven up. By the time that

the horse was put in it was close on to the half hour.

"Drive as hard as you can go to the Priory, my man," said the major.

The sulky ostler made no remark, but a look of surprise passed over his phlegmatic countenance. For years back so little had been heard of the old monastery that its very existence had been almost forgotten in Bedsworth. Now, whole troops of Londoners were coming down in succession, demanding to be driven there. He pondered over the strange facts as he drove through the darkness, but the only conclusion to which his bucolic mind could come was that it was high time to raise the fare to that particular point.

It was a miserable night, stormy and wet and bitterly cold. None of the five men had a thought to spare for the weather, however. The two foreigners had been so infected by the suppressed excitement of their companions, or had so identified themselves with their comrades' cause, that they were as eager as the others.

"The gate is just at the end of the lane, sir."

"Don't pull up at the gate, but take us a little past it."

"There ain't no way in except the gate," the driver remarked.

"Do what you're ordered," said the major sternly.

Once again the ostler's face betrayed unbounded astonishment. He slewed half a yard round in his seat and took as good a look as was possible in the uncertain light at the faces of his passengers. It had occurred to him that it was more than likely that he would have to swear to them at some future date in a police court. "I'd know that thick 'un w' the red face," he muttered to himself, "and him w' the yellow beard and the stick."

They passed the stone pillars with the weather-beaten heraldic devices, and drove along by the high park wall. When they had gone a hundred yards or so the major ordered the driver to pull up, and they all got down. The increased fare was paid without remonstrance, and the ostler rattled away homewards, with the intention of pulling up at the county police station and lodging information as to the suspicious visitors whom he had brought down.

"It is likely that they have a watch at the gate," said the major. "We must keep away from there. This wall is a great height. We'd best keep on until we find the easiest place to scale it."

"I could get over it here," Tom said eagerly.

"Wait a bit. A few minutes can make no difference one way or the other. Ould Sir Colin used to say that there were more battles lost by over haste than by slowness. What's the high bank running along on the right here?"

"Dat's a railway bankment," said Von Baumer. "See the posts and the little red lights over yonder."

"So it is. The wall seems to be to be lower here. What's this dark thing? Hullo, here's a door leading into the grounds."

"It is locked, though."

"Give me a hoist," Tom said imploringly. "Don't throw a minute away. You can't tell what may be going on inside. At this very moment, for all we know, they may be plotting her murder."

"He has right," said Von Baumer. "We shall await here until we hear from you. Help him, my friends—shove him up."

Tom caught the coping of the wall, although the broken glass upon the top cut deeply into his hands. With a great heave he swung himself up, and was soon astride upon the top.

"Here's the whistle," said the major, standing on tiptoe to reach a bowstretched hand. "If you want us give a good blow at it. We'll be with you in a brace of shakes. If we can't get over the wall we'll have the door down."

Tom was in the act of letting himself drop into the wood, when suddenly the watchers below saw him crouch down upon the wall, and lie motionless as though listening intently.

"Hush!" he whispered, leaning over. "Some one is coming through the wood." The wind had died away and the storm subsided. Even from the lane they could hear the sound of feet, and of muffled voices inside the grounds. They all crouched down in the shadow of the wall. Tom lay flat upon the glass-studded coping, and no one looking from below could distinguish him from the wall itself.

(To be continued.)

Stung!

The leap year girl had just proposed. "But I don't care enough to support a wife," protested the cautious young man.

"Oh, that's all right," assured the maid, eagerly. "We can live on bread and cheese and kisses."

But the cautious young man shook his head.

"No," he replied, "that would never do. If you baked the bread it would kill me, I could never endure cheese, and there are microbes in kisses. Good night."

A Great Idea.

Mrs. Bowers—How do you persuade your husband to buy you such expensive hats?

Mrs. Jackson—I take him shopping with me and walk him about until he can't stand, and then wind up in a shop where they sell bonnets. He'll buy anything to get home.

Hard to Control.

"Has your father given you that automobile yet?"

"No; it is so difficult to overcome his objections. He says that the gasoline cars are in bad odor and that the electric ones are simply shocking."

Spitfall.

Miss Elder—I'm having just the loveliest gown made. It's tan cloth with old rose trimming. Don't you think that will be becoming?

Miss Chellus—Yes, the 'old rose' will be especially appropriate for you.—Philadelphia Press.

Out with It.

"Do you believe love is blind, George?"

"Of course it is."

"Then what good is this gaslight to us?"



Quality of Seeds.

As the result of tests of alfalfa, red clover and grass seeds secured in the open market Chief Galloway of the bureau of plants industry makes a report that is certainly of interest to farmers.

Red Clover.—Of the 1,217 samples of red clover seed secured 405, or one-third, contained seed of dodder, 424 contained traces of yellow trefoil seed, and 185 bore evidence of having originated in Chile.

Alfalfa.—Of the 399 samples of alfalfa seed secured 191, or about one-half, contained seed of dodder, 135 contained a trace of yellow trefoil seed, 120 contained a trace of sweet clover seed, and 16 contained a trace of bur clover seed.

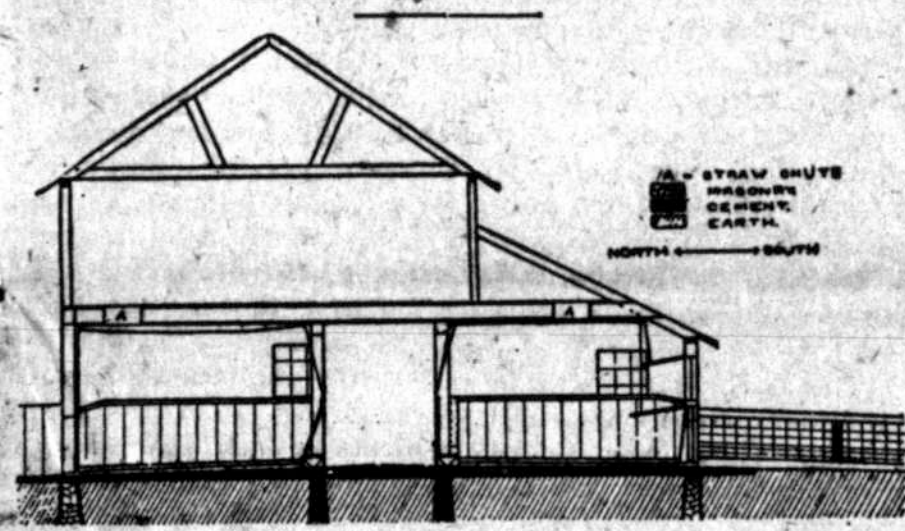
Bromus Inermis.—Of the 55 samples of Bromus inermis seed obtained 15 contained seed of cheat, or chess, 28 contained from 2 to 3 per cent of seed of the wheat grasses, several contained seed of meadow fescue and one contained more than 24 per cent of meadow fescue and rye grass seed together.

Kentucky Blue Grass.—Of the 429 samples of Kentucky blue grass seed obtained only 8 were found to be free from any trace of Canada blue grass. In most of these samples the trace of Canada blue grass found was immature seed, showing that it was harvested with the Kentucky blue grass seed. The seeds of the two plants not ripening at the same time, it is improbable that mature seed of Canada blue grass would be harvested with Kentucky blue grass seed. In 110 samples, however, Canada blue grass seed was found in quantities exceeding 5 per cent, 32 of these being Canada blue grass seed misbranded as Kentucky blue grass seed.

The Potato Bug.

The potato bug, or Colorado potato beetle, passes the winter in the ma-

FARM-BUILDING CONSTRUCTION.



PLAN OF A PIGGERY.

The above diagram shows a cross section of a piggyery building thirty-four feet wide, which may be of any desired length. The foundation is of stone, feet wide, which may be of any desired length. The floor is of concrete, the lower three inches being comprised of coarse gravel seven parts and cement one part, the upper inch being mixed three parts sharp sand to one of cement. The alley running throughout the center of the building is six feet wide, with a crowned floor one-half inch higher in the center, to insure its being kept perfectly dry. The floors of the pens are given a fall of two inches from the alley to the outer doors.

The partitions are constructed of one and a quarter-inch boards cut into three-foot lengths. These are placed in an upright position, the bottom ends resting on a two-by-four and the tops capped with similar material. The left above is about eight feet high at top posts and furnishes an abundance of room for storage of straw, crates, crate materials, etc. No meal feed should be stored here, as it is likely to become contaminated.

The illustration shows the ropes and pulleys by which the doors and ventilators are opened and closed from the feeding alleys. On the right side the door and ventilator are open; on the left side closed.

ure form. As soon as the potatoes are up these bugs begin feeding and laying eggs on the young leaves. The young that hatch from these eggs, as well as the next brood, are the ones that do the damage. Therefore, it is necessary that treatment should be begun as soon as the young beetles appear on the vines. Dust the plants while the dew is on, with a mixture made of 1 pound Paris green to 10 pounds of slaked lime or cheap flour. Another good method is to spray the plants with a composition of 2 ounces of Paris green in 50 gallons of Bordeaux mixture, spraying the vines two or three times. For this purpose the Bordeaux mixture should be made out of 3 pounds of bluestone and 5 pounds of lime to 50 gallons of water. This mixture will not only kill the beetle, but also prevent the early blight from destroying the leaves and stems of the vines.

Farm Notes.

When the wheels get so dry that they rattle, have the tires properly set; do not try to chink up the spokes.

With all classes of stock the value of the feed is the same, whether it is supplied to the scrawnies or the best of thoroughbreds.

Teams that have been partially idle for some time should come into work again gradually and their shoulders bathed with salt water.

The cutworm is the larvae of a moth; the worm is of a brown color, fat and sluggish, about an inch long, and feeds only during the night.

For bumble-foot in poultry paint the corn liberally with tincture of iodine daily for a week. If this is done in the early stages the corn can be saved.

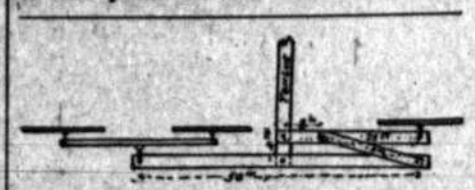
If given before the hogs get past the eating and drinking stage, the following is claimed to be an infallible cure for hog cholera: To a barrel of good slop add one pint of Venetian red and one pint of kerosene oil. Mix well.

The first rule for getting a good profit from poultry is to get the chicks hatched early, and the next is to keep those chicks growing so fast that they will reach laying maturity before the commencement of cold weather.

The garden should contain most or all of the common medicinal and flavoring herbs. Most of these can be grown with very little trouble, and the herb plot should include such useful plants as sage, hoarhound, caraway, saffron, pennyroyal, tansy and others that will suggest themselves.

Three Horse Doubletree.

A doubletree attachment to binder or sulky plow can be made according to the plan shown. The dimensions



can be varied slightly to accommodate horses of different sizes.

Seed Germination.

It requires from 20 to 30 days for asparagus seed to germinate; beans, 5 to 10 days; borecole, broc-coll, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower, 5 to 12 days; carrots, 14 to 21 days; celery, 14 to 20 days; corn salad, 14 days; corn, 8 to 14 days; cress, curled, 3 to 5 days; cress, water, 12 to 14 days; cucumbers, 5 to 10 days; egg-plant, 8 to 20 days; endive, 3 to 7 days; lettuce, 3 to 5 days; melons, cantaloupes, 5 to 10 days; melons, water, 8 to 15 days; mustard, 3 to 6 days; onions, 7 to 14 days; parsley, 20 to 30 days; parsnips, 8 to 14 days; peas, 5 to 10 days; pepper, 8 to 20 days.

Wood Ashes.

Ashes made from hard wood are more valuable than those made from soft wood. It is claimed that some ashes from soft wood have not enough value to make it worth while to bother with them. It has also been discovered that the value is largely governed by the part of the tree from which the ashes are made. It is declared by

THE WEEKLY HISTORIAN



1471—Edward, Prince of Wales, son of Henry VI. of England, killed at the battle of Tewkesbury.

1605—The principle of the appropriation act adopted by the Commonwealth and definitely established.

1747—William of Nassau appointed Stadtholder of the Netherlands.

1776—Rhode Island declared itself free of Great Britain, the first of the thirteen American colonies to take such action.

1779—Norfolk, Va., occupied by the British.

1794—U. S. Postoffice Department established by Congress.

1799—Bonaparte defeated at St. Jean d'Acre... Seringapatam taken by the British and the empire of Hyder Ali extinguished by the death of his son, Sultan Tipoo Sahib.

1804—Dutch surrendered the island of Surinam to the British.

1806—Robert Morris, the financier of the American revolution, died in Philadelphia.

1813—Americans evacuated York, Canada, after setting fire to the city.

1814—Oswego, N. Y., taken by a combined force of British and Canadian troops.

1826—Ex-Empress Eugenie of France born in Granada.

1828—Test act repealed by the British Parliament.

1840—Many lives and much property lost by tornado in Adams county, Mississippi.

1846—Gen. Taylor, in command of the army of occupation in Texas, marched to the relief of Fort Brown.

1852—Charles Warren Fairbanks, Vice President of the United States, born.

1853—The Geneva, the first Atlantic steamer at Quebec, arrived at that port.

1854—Sultan of Turkey gave a banquet in honor of Emperor Napoleon.

1857—The Indian mutineers seized Delhi.

1858—Minnesota admitted to statehood.

1864—Battle of the Wilderness began... The Danes defeated the Allies in a naval battle off Heligoland.

1865—Last fight in the Civil War at Palmetto Ranch, Texas.

1868—Argument in the impeachment trial of President Johnson closed.

1870—The ironclad ship *Lamarr* launched.

1885—Battle at Batoche.

1886—Six policemen killed by anarchists in the Haymarket riots in Chicago.

1900—Peary discovered the northern coast of Greenland.

1902—Revolutionists in San Domingo deposed President Jimines.

1904—The Japanese captured Fengwang-cheng, the Russians retreating without giving battle.

1905—More than a score of lives lost in a tornado near Marquette, Kan.

1906—The Dominion government took over the defenses at Esquimaux.

1907—Ernest W. Huffcut, legal adviser to the Governor of New York, committed suicide... Gen. Kuroki of Japan and the Duke of Abruzzi visited Washington.



Rosenben, once a peerless sprinter, was badly beaten at the Aqueduct track in his first start this season.

The two Cornell four-oared shells crashed into each other on the river and both were put out of commission.

There seems to be every probability that an English lawn tennis team will play in America during the coming summer.

Many turfmen believe that a hard fight will be made in the Tennessee Legislature next winter to repeal the anti-pool selling laws.

The farmers at Ames, in their track squad, are developing some men in the weight events who may make a showing in the conference meet in Chicago.

Tom Jones leads the first basemen of the American League with 991; Williams leads the second basemen with 1000; Lord leads the third basemen with 1000, and Wagner of Boston the shortstops with 1000.

Notwithstanding the anti-race track laws enacted in the last Legislature in Tennessee, Montgomery Park and Billings Park, respectively, the homes for running and trotting horses at Memphis, will remain open as homes for the horses.

Indiana university is to have another world's champion if present prospects prove a success. "Long John" Miller, the variety high jumper, bids fair to win as much fame as Le Roy Sames, who became the world's champion pole vaulter while a student there two years ago. Miller recently cleared the bar in the high jump at 6 feet 2 inches.