

The Firm of Girdlestone

BY
A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

By evening the gale was at its height. The Black Eagle was running under maintopmast and foretopmast staysail. The sea had risen very quickly, as it will when the wind comes upon a swell. As far as the eye could see from the summit of a wave there was a vista of dark towering ridges with their threatening crests of foam. When the barque sank in the hollow these gleaming summits rose as high as her mainyard, and the two natives, clinging to the weather-boards, looked up in terror and amazement at the masses of water which hung above them. Once or twice waves actually broke over the vessel, crashing and roaring down the deck, and washing hither and thither until gradually absorbed between the planks or drained away through the scupper holes. On each of these occasions the poor rotten vessel would lurch and shiver in every plank, as if with a foreknowledge of its fate.

The carpenter came aft, balancing himself as best he could, for the deck was only a few degrees off the perpendicular. "The leak is gainin' fast," he said. "The hands are clean done up. There's land on the starboard bow."

"Keep your heart up!" Miggs shouted, and then crawled along to the Girdlestons. "There's no hope for the ship, but we may save ourselves," he said. "You'll have to take your turn at the pumps."

"He's not fit to command," said Ezra to the mate. "What would you advise?" "We'll bring her round and lower the boats on the lee side. They may live or no, but it's the only chance for us. Them two boats will hold us 'a easy."

The ship was settling down in the water so fast that it was no difficult matter to let the boats down. They only hung a few feet above the surface. The majority of the crew got safely into the long boat, and the two Girdlestons with Miggs and four seamen, occupied the gig. The sun was shining on the rugged precipices, showing out the green turf upon their summit and a little dark group of peasants, who were watching the scene from above, but making no effort to assist the castaways. There was no alternative but to row straight in for the nearest point of land, for the boats were filling, and might go down at any moment.

"The ship's gone!" Ezra said, as they rose on the summit of a wave. When they came up again all looked round, but there was no sign of the ill-fated Black Eagle.

As he spoke a great wave hurried the boat in upon its broad bosom, and flung it down upon the cruel jagged rocks, which bristled from the base of the cliff. There was a horrible rending crash, and the stout keel snapped asunder, while a second wave swept over it, tearing out the struggling occupants, and bearing them on, only to hurl them upon a second ridge beyond. The peasants upon the cliff gave piteous cries of grief and pity, which blended with the agonized groans and screams of drowning men and the thunder of the pitiless surge. Looking down they could see the black dots, which indicated the heads of the poor wretches below, diminishing one by one as they were hurled upon the rocks or dragged down by the undercurrent.

Ezra was a strong swimmer, but when he had shaken himself free of the boat, and kicked away a seaman who clung to him, he made no attempt to strike out. He knew that the waves would bear him quickly enough on to the rocks, and he reserved himself for the struggle with them. A great roller came surging over the outlying reef. It carried him in like a feather and hurled him up against the face of the cliff. As he struggled upon its crest, he mechanically put out his hands and seized a projecting portion of the rock. The shock of the contact was tremendous, but he retained his grasp and found himself, when the wave receded, standing battered and breathless upon a small niche in the front of the rock which just gave him foothold. It was a marvelous escape, for looking on either side he could not see any break in the sheer declivity.

He was by no means safe as yet. If a wave had landed him there, another might come as high and drag him away. Looking down, he saw one or two smaller ones break into spray far below him, and then a second great green billow came rolling majestically towards him. He eyed it as it came foaming in, and calculated that it would come at least as high as his knees. Would it drag him back with it, or could he hold his own? He braced himself as firmly as he could, placing his feet apart, and digging his nails into the inequalities of the rock until the blood gushed from them. The water surged up upon him, and he felt it tugging like some murderous demon at his legs, but he held on bravely until the pressure decreased. Looking below he saw the wave sinking down the face of the cliff. Another wave overtook it and welled it up again, and then from the depths of the green waters Ezra saw a long white arm shoot up, and he grasped the edge of the ledge upon which he stood.

Even before the face appeared the young man knew that the hand was his father's. A second followed the first, and then the old merchant's face was up lifted from the waves. He was cruelly bruised and battered, and his clothes had been partly torn away. He recognized his son, however, and looked up at him beseechingly, while he held on with all his strength to the ledge of rock. So small was the space that his clinging fingers touched Ezra's toes.

"There's no room here," the young man said, brutally. "Hardly room for one."

The merchant was hanging with the lower portion of his body in the water. It was but a few instants, but the old man had time to think of many an incident in his past life. He looked up appealingly at his son. Ezra saw that the next wave would lift him right up on to the ledge. In that case he might be hustled off.

"Leave go!" he cried.

"Help me, Ezra!" His son brought down his heavy heel upon the bloodless hands. The old African trader gave a wild shriek and fell back into the sea. Looking down, Ezra saw his despairing face gazing at him through the water. Slowly it sank until it was but a flickering white patch far down in the green depths. At the same instant a thick rope came dangling down the face of the cliff, and the young man knew that he was saved.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Great was the excitement of the worthy couple at Phillimore Gardens when Kate Harston was brought back to them. Good Mrs. Dimsdale pressed her to her bosom and kissed her and scolded her and wept over her, while the doctor was so moved that it was only by assuming an expression of portentous severity and by bellowing and stamping about that he was able to keep himself in decent control.

"And you really thought we had forgotten you because we were insane enough to stop writing at that villain's request?" he said, patting Kate's pale cheeks tenderly, and kissing her.

"I was very foolish," she said, blushing prettily and rearranging her hair, which had been somewhat tumbled by her numerous caresses.

"Oh, that scoundrel—that pair of scoundrels!" roared the doctor, shaking his fist and dancing about on the hearth-rug. "Pray heaven they may catch 'em before the trial comes off!"

The good physician's prayer was not answered in this case, for Burt was the only criminal who appeared in the dock. Our friends all went down to the Winchester Assizes to give evidence, and the navy was duly convicted of the death of Rebecca Taylor and condemned to death. He was executed some three weeks afterwards, dying as he had lived, stolid and unrepenting.

There is a little unpretending church not far from Phillimore Gardens, in which a little unpretending clergyman preaches every Sunday out of a very shabby pulpit. It lies in Castle lane, which is a narrow by-way, and the great crowd of church goers ebbs and flows within a hundred yards of it, but none know of its existence, for it has never risen to the dignity of a spire, and the bell is so very diminutive that the average muffin man produces quite as much noise. Hence, with the exception of some few families who have chanced to find their way there, and have been so pleased with their spiritual welcome that they have returned, there is a poor and fluctuating congregation. So scanty is it that the struggling incumbent could very well sweep when he has spent the week in polishing and strengthening his sermon, and then finds upon the Sunday how very scanty is the audience to whom it is to be addressed.

Imagine, then, this good man's surprise when asked to publish the bands of marriage of two couples simultaneously, each of whom he knew to be in the upper circles of life, and when informed at the same time that the said marriages were actually to be celebrated under his own auspices and in his own church. In the fullness of his heart he at once bought a most unwearable black bonnet with lilac flowers and red berries, which he brought in triumph to his wife, who, good woman, affected extreme delight, and afterwards cut away all the obnoxious tinsel and replaced it to her own taste. The scanty congregation was no less surprised when they heard that Tobias Clutterbuck, bachelor, was about to marry Lavinia Scully, widow, and that Thomas Dimsdale was to do as much to Catherine Harston, spinster. They communicated the tidings to their friends, and the result was a great advertisement to the little church, so that the incumbent preached his favorite sermon upon barren fig trees to a crowded audience, and received such an offering as had never entered into his wildest dreams.

And if this was an advertisement to the Castle lane church, how much more so was it when the very pompous carriages came rolling up with their very pompous drivers, all of whom, being married men, had a depreciatory and weary expression upon their faces, to show that they had done it all before and that it was nothing new to them. Out of one carriage there jumped a very jaunty gentleman, somewhat past the middle age and a little inclined to stoutness, but looking very healthy and rosy nevertheless. Beside him there walked a tall, tawny-bearded man, who glanced solicitously every now and again at his companion, as though he were the bottle-holder at a prize fight, and feared that his man might collapse at a moment's notice. From a second carriage there emerged an athletic, brown-faced young fellow accompanied by a small wizened gentleman in spotless attire, who was in such a state of nervousness that he dropped his lavender glove twice on his way up the aisle. These gentlemen grouped themselves at the end of the church conversing in low whispers and looking exceedingly uncomfortable, as is the prerogative of the sterner sex under such circumstances. Mr. Gilray, who was Tom's best man, was introduced to Herr Von Baumser, and everyone was very affable and nervous.

Now there comes a rustling of drapery, and every one turns their heads as the brides sweep up to the altar. Here is Mrs. Scully, looking quite as charming as she did fifteen years ago on the last occasion when she performed the ceremony. She was dressed in a French-grey gown with bonnet to match, and the neatest little bouquet in the world, for which the major had ransacked Covent Garden. Behind her came bonny Kate, a very vision of loveliness in her fairly like lace and beautiful ivory satin. Her dark lashes drooped over her violet eyes and a slight flush tinged her cheeks, but she glided steadily into her place and did her share in the responses when the earnest little clergyman appeared upon the scene. There was Dr. Dimsdale, too, with the brightest of smiles and snowiest of waistcoats, giving away the brides in the most open-handed fashion. His wife, too, was by his side in tears and purple velvet, and many other friends and relations, including the two socialists, who came at

the major's invitation, and beamed on every one out of a side pew. Then there was the signing of the registers, and such a kissing and a weeping and a distributing of fees as never was seen in Castle-lane church before. And Mrs. Dimsdale, as one of the witnesses, would insist upon writing her name in the space reserved for the bride, on which there were many small jokes passed, and much laughter. Then the wheezy old organ struck up Mendelssohn's wedding march, and the major puffed out his chest and stumped down the aisle with his bride, while Tom followed with his looking round with proud and happy eyes. The carriages rolled up, there was a slapping of doors and a cracking of whips, and two more couples had started hand in hand down the long road of life which leads—who shall say whither?

The breakfast was at Phillimore Gardens, and a very glorious breakfast it was. Those who were present still talk of the manner in which the health of the brides was proposed by Dr. Dimsdale, and of the enthusiasm with which the toast was received by the company. Also of the flowery address in which the major returned thanks for the said toast, and the manly demeanor of the younger man as he followed suit. They speak, too, of many other pleasant things said and done upon that occasion. How Von Baumser proposed the health of the little incumbent, and the little incumbent that of Dr. Dimsdale, and the doctor drank to the unpronounceable Russian, who, being unable to reply, sang a revolutionary song which no one could understand. Very happy and very hearty was everyone by the time that the hour came at which the carriages were ordered, when, amid a patter of rice and a chorus of heartfelt good wishes, the happy couples drove off upon their travels.

The liabilities of the firm of Girdlestone proved to be less serious than at first imagined. After the catastrophe which had befallen the founder of the business, there was almost a panic in Fenchurch street, but on examination it proved that though the books had been deliberately falsified for some time, yet trade had been so brisk of late that, with a little help, the firm could continue to exist. Dimsdale threw all his money and his energy into the matter, and took Gilray into partnership, which proved to be an excellent thing for both of them. The firm of Dimsdale & Gilray is now among the most successful and popular of all the English firms connected with the African trade. Of their captains there is none upon whom they place greater reliance than upon McPherson, whose boat was providentially saved from the danger which destroyed his former captain and his employer.

What became of Ezra Girdlestone was never known. Some years after Tom heard from a commercial traveler of a melancholy, broken man who haunted the low betting houses of San Francisco, and who met his death eventually in some drunken fracas. There was much about this desperado which tallied with the description of young Girdlestone, but nothing certain was ever known about the matter.

And now I must bid adieu to the company with whom I have walked so long. I see them going on down the vista of the future, gathering wisdom and happiness as they go. There is the major, as stubby-toed and pigeon-breasted as ever, broken from many of his Bohemian ways, but still full of anecdote and of kindness. There is his henchman, Von Baumser, too, who is a constant diner at his hospitable board, and who conveys so many sweets to a young Clutterbuck who has made his appearance, that one might suspect him of receiving a commission from the family doctor. Mrs. Clutterbuck, as buxom and pleasant as ever, makes noble efforts at stopping these contraband supplies, but the wily Teuton still manages to smuggle them through in the face of every obstacle. I see Kate and her husband, chastened by their many troubles, and making the road to the grave pleasant to the good old couple who are so proud of their son. All these I watch as they pass away into the dim coming time, and I know as I shut the book that, whatever may be in store for us there, they, at least, can never in the eternal justice of things, come to aught but good.

(THE END.)

Premature Obituaries. One of the traditions of the office of the New York Herald has to do with an editor who was a great upholder of the infallibility of his paper. It simply couldn't make a mistake.

A flustered citizen once burst into his office and bustled up to the editorial desk. "See here!" he demanded. "This obituary notice. It's all wrong!"

"What's wrong about it?" asked the editor in calm confidence. "Why, it's about me. I'm not dead!" "If the Herald says you're dead," sternly replied the editor, "you're dead. But," he added magnanimously, "if you don't like being dead, we'll print your birth notice."

His attitude was rather different from that of another editor, who, on being shown by the man most interested that the death of the complainant was falsely reported, apologized profusely and offered to make it all right.

"We'll print a correction at once," he said. "Well," said the man who wasn't dead, "perhaps it would be better to let it stand. I'll show it to my friends when they want to borrow money."—Woman's Home Companion.

Always Getting Stuck. Stubb—What is Cogwood doing since he bought his new automobile? Penn—Following the horses. Stubb—Ah, playing the races, eh? Penn—No, following the farm horses that tow his machine to town every time it breaks down.

The Virtue of Brevity. Kwoter—Too many words, of course, are wearisome. Brevity is the soul of wit.

Wise (with a yawn)—Not always, but in any event it is always commendable.—Philadelphia Press.

Those who jump at conclusions often take a tumble.

THE MUSE OF HISTORY ON THE GLORIOUS FOURTH.



JES' PLAIN TORPEDOES.

The good old Fourth's a-comin'—the best day in the year. And little chaps get anxious-like when once its drawn near. They talk of firecrackers and they dream about the noise. The dear old Fourth was certainly Jes' made for little boys. Bill's got a great big cannon, with fuse you have to light. And lots of great big crackers that's filled with dynamite, you bet. But I'm a little feller—aint' have as old as he. And I guess that plain torpedoes will have to do for me.

Pa says that giant crackers ain't fit for little chaps. He's sore on all top pistols and hates these paper caps. He don't intend his children shall ever celebrate. By blowing off their fingers—he says they'll have to wait. "You're nothin' but a baby," my father says "as yet. And your daddy can't quite spare you; he's got some giant crackers." Well, that I know is true. But I guess that plain torpedoes will have to do for me. It's hard to have big brothers and watch them at their play. And Jes' to be a little chap and sort of 'in the way. To have folks always tell you, you can't do thus and so. Because you're Jes', a little chap—not old enough, you know. But ma she sees I'm fearful, so she takes me in her lap. And says, "Why, what's the matter? You're then, as she bends to kiss me, 'I'm brave as I can be. I guess that plain torpedoes are good enough for me!"—Louis E. Thayer, in Woman's Home Companion.

OLD GLORY.

A Salem Skipper Credited with Giving the Flag This Name.

HAT the American flag was named Old Glory in 1851 by a Salem (Mass.) skipper named William Dring is asserted by the Boston Globe. He was at that time captain of the brig Charles Doggett. Captain Dring, a successful deep sea sailor, was preparing to shape the brig's course to the southern Pacific.

Just before the brig left Salem a young man at the head of a party of friends saluted Captain Dring on the deck of the Doggett and presented him with a large and beautifully made American flag. It was done up in stops and when sent aloft and broken out to the air Captain Dring christened it Old Glory.

He took it to the south Pacific, and years after when old age forced him to relinquish the sea he treasured the flag as an old friend.

Captain Dring moved to Nashville, Tenn., in 1857 and died there in 1893. Previous to the outbreak of hostilities between the North and the South Old Glory was hung to the breeze every day from the window of Captain Dring's Nashville house, but when the bullets began to zip and the odor of gunpowder to taint the air the old flag had to be sequestered.

It was kept out of sight inside a great bed comfortably until Feb. 27, 1892, when Brig. Gen. Nelson's wing of the Union army appeared in Nashville. Captain Dring presented it to the general to be hoisted on the capitol. It was run up by Captain Dring himself. He watched it through the night, and, a heavy wind

coming up, he took it down and sent a new flag up in its place.

The original Old Glory was preserved and after the death of Captain Dring it was presented by the compiler of the Driver memoirs to the Essex Institute at Salem, Mass., where it may now be seen.

KING CHRISTIAN KICKED HIM.

Royal Bandmaster Forgot to Play "The Star Spangled Banner."

A short time after the Civil War, writes a correspondent of the New York Times, a small fleet of our ships took the then assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus V. Fox, to Europe to cultivate international friendship.

While in Copenhagen the late King Christian invited Mr. Fox and the principal officers of his fleet to dine. The following incident of the visit was related to me by the late Rear Admiral Alexander Murray, who was then in command of the monitor Augusta:

"From my seat at dinner I looked out on the pleasant lawn where the band was stationed. After the principal business of the dinner was over, at the invitation of King Christian the glasses were filled and, all the table being at attention, his majesty arose and with due formality proposed 'The President of the United States.' Glasses were raised, but the King paused, glared over his shoulder and abruptly left the dining hall. The guests, upon invitation of an aid, resumed themselves.

"In a few minutes I saw the bandmaster come hurriedly into sight, followed by the King, who kicked him across my field of view. Shortly after the King returned to the dining hall, took his place at the head of the table, and the guests having risen, again proposed 'The President of the United States.' As he raised his glass the band struck up 'The Star Spangled Banner.' With a satisfied smile his majesty emptied his glass.

"King Christian was democratic and kind and beloved by his people, but all things had to be done decently and in order or he'd know the reason why."

Facts About Firecrackers.

The greater part of the almost \$2,000,000 worth of firecrackers annually exported by China comes to New York. And the United States stands next to China in its use of them.

Thousands of Chinese men, women and children work at the making of firecrackers, for there are no manufacturing there, the work being done by hand. They receive only about \$1.40 for making 10,000 firecrackers, laboring from six in the morning until eleven at night seven days a week.

So a Chinese woman or child works like a slave for two days to earn what is spent on a few bunches of firecrackers by the urchin bent on doing justice to the Glorious Fourth.

Suggestions for Fireworks. One of the latest quips is to paint a small bomb in imitation of a golf ball and let a friend take a whack at it. One of the most propitious places for a firecracker is a fluffy hat, or, better still, the back hair.

One of the capital diversions of an evening entertainment is to fasten a pin-wheel to a lace curtain, touch a match to the fuse and see what the firemen do. Some may prefer a plate glass window for a skyrocket target, but the best authorities agree that it is seen at its best in a crowded dining room.—New York Herald.

LITTLE JOHNNY'S GLASS.



Mr. Smirks sold fireworks. His trade was very bright; People bought them right and left To set them off at night.



But just then little Johnny passed— The owner's back was turned— To see the whole display go off The soul of Johnny yearned.



He quickly found a burning glass, And held it to the sun; A little spark he soon espied— And then the deed was done.



A flash—a bang—a pop—a crack! Ah! said 'tis to relate! Next day Smirks told his neighbors That his stock had gone off great.

Some Fourth of July Proverbs. A lit firecracker in the hand isn't worth two in the pack. There is no use pulling the trigger after the gun has been fired. Do not look a gift cannon in the mouth. Never light your Roman candle at both ends.

It is the pinwheel that loses by doing a good turn. One swallow doesn't make a spring nor one firecracker a Fourth.

No matter how warm and wearied a man may be a firecracker dropped down his shirt collar will stimulate him.