

The MYSTERY of the GREEN CRAB!



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A LETTER for you, sir!" My famous friend, Mr. Herlock Sholmes, took the envelope from the grubby paw of our landlady and scanned the crest on the flap. It consisted of three cannon-balls, rampant on a canister of grape-shot. Sholmes' hatchet-like face lighted appreciably.

"From my old friend, Colonel Curry-Cummerbund, of Cocklemouth-cum-Cookham," he volunteered.

He tore open the envelope, and read the contents.

"The colonel wants us to spend the weekend at his seaside bungalow, Jotson. An opportune invitation, methinks. Can you manage to get away?"

"Yes, to-morrow," I replied. "My patient will not survive my next visit to him, I fear."

I flicked a tear from my cheek with a piece of blotting-paper with which I happened to be toying. The thought affected me deeply. I had hoped to keep my patient alive—if not too robust—for many years. That by my professional skill I could have accomplished it, I am certain, but for inadvertently giving him a dose of rough on rats in mistake for syrup of figs.

The prospect of a holiday appealed to Sholmes keenly. Although no detective myself, even I could discern how his spirits had risen. He stood on his head on the lid of the cocaine-cask, and kicked his check slippers to the ceiling. Resuming a more normal position, he gave me a playful dig in the waistcoat that sent me backwards into the coal-scuttle.

On the following day, after I had left a wreath at the home of my late patient, Sholmes and I took train for the old-world fishing village of Cocklemouth-cum-Cookham. Colonel Curry-Cummerbund himself was at the station to meet us, and gallantly insisted on carrying Sholmes' tin of shag to the waiting bus.

A delightful penny ride along the promenade, where the invigorating odour of seaweed and whelks waited to our nostrils, brought us to Howitzer House, the colonel's residence. Here the colonel's sole retainer, a spry old Army servant of ninety-seven, took our luggage upstairs. Sholmes followed, carrying the cocaine-cask and his violin, while I brought up the rear with the tin of shag.

As we dressed for dinner the veteran entertained us with a thrilling account of how he saved the British tanks at the Battle of Inkerman. But for him the troops would have had the supplies of water cut off, and have been forced to consume their lime-juice rations neat. For this magnificent feat the fine old soldier had been rewarded by having

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Another laughable adventure of Herlock Sholmes, the world's worst detective, recorded by his faithful friend, Dr. Jotson.

a sentence of ninety days' C.B. reduced to only sixty.

After dinner Colonel Curry-Cummerbund, Sholmes, and I took our ease on deck-chairs on a balcony overlooking the sea. The sun, a blaze of glory like a poached egg, setting behind the cockle-sheds to the west, gave a mellow touch to the peaceful scene.

"This is bliss!" I murmured, as I quietly dropped over the balcony the Flor de Stingaree cigar given to me by the colonel.

Sholmes asphyxiated a cloud of midgets as he lighted his pipeful of shag, and sent a cloud of acrid smoke swirling in the air.

"You are right, my dear Jotson," he said contentedly. "A peaceful holiday, far from the atmosphere of crime and criminals, is what I have sighed for during the last thirty-five years!"

We listened to the colonel's thrilling story of how he rode the winner on the Grand National switchback at Wembley. Then, just as our host was starting an account of a shooting exploit, by which he won a furry Felix the cat mascot at the same Exhibition, the old soldier-servant announced a visitor.

To our amazement, the caller was none other than Inspector Pinkeye, of Scotland Yard.

"Bless me, Pinkeye!" exclaimed Sholmes, after he had introduced him to the colonel.

"What strange case has brought you to Cocklemouth-cum-Cookham, of all places, at this merry holiday season?"

"The mystery of the green crab," answered Pinkeye darkly.

He drew the back of his hand across his mouth. The colonel, noticing the unconscious action, called for his servant to bring a jug of iced cocoa.

"The green crab?" I exclaimed. "What's that?"

"Ah!" said Pinkeye, even more darkly. "That is what I have to find out. But I have a shrewd suspicion."

"What?" I asked eagerly. "That it's a lobster?"

Pinkeye gave me a nasty look, and turned to Herlock Sholmes.

"This would have been a case after your own heart, Mr. Sholmes," he said. "Fortunately, I have practically solved the mystery now. Yesterday the local police telephoned to Scotland Yard to seek my expert aid in solving the curious case of Benjamin Bagwash!"

"Benjamin Bagwash!" exclaimed the colonel, gripping his chair. "Not old Benjamin Bagwash?"

"None other," answered Pinkeye. "It seems, Mr. Sholmes, that Bagwash is a well-known local character who lives alone in a cottage called the Hippyhoys. He has been regarded for years as being a wealthy old miser. The day before yesterday he was found unconscious, sitting in a gooseberry-bush in his own back garden. He was removed in a wheelbarrow to the Cocklemouth Cottage Hospital, and found to have the acute collywobbles."

"Collywobbles!" I remarked. "Doubtless you mean the patient was suffering from intermittent hypocoelosis of the thaumaturgical duodenum?"

"Ahem—y-yes! What you said, doctor!" Pinkeye took a draught from his goblet of iced cocoa, and resumed:

"Well, after Bagwash had been put to bed in hospital, a startling discovery was made. A lady called Mrs. Noggins, who went to the Hippyhoys three times a week to do charring, found that a purse of golden sovereigns, which the old miser kept in the soup-tureen, had disappeared."

"Stolen?" cried the colonel.

"Clearly," remarked Pinkeye. "Since coming to Cocklemouth-cum-Cookham I have been putting two and two together. When I saw old Benjamin Bagwash in the hospital ward he was slightly delirious. But he kept repeating these remarkable words: 'At the back of the green crab under the shell.' My theory is that someone who knew of the existence of the gold sent Bagwash a present

of a crab. The old man, all unsuspecting, opened it, and consumed the portion from under the shell at the back of the crab.

"As later he was peacefully plucking gooseberries in his garden he was attacked by the—er—what Dr. Jotson said, and fell unconscious. Meantime, the sender of the crab, who doubtless had watched the sufferings of his victim, entered the house and snaffled the doings from the soup-tureen."

A queer smile hovered over the lean face of my famous friend as Pinkeye finished.

"Then you won't need my assistance, my dear Pinkeye?" he remarked. "I may enjoy my holiday in peace?"

"You may, Mr. Sholmes," said the bluff inspector, with a laugh. "The case is as good as ended. Although, unfortunately, the last remains of the particularly green crab of which poor Bagwash partook were not to be found in the dustbin at the Hippyhoys, I have no doubt they can be traced. And so can the thief."

"But supposing Benjamin Bagwash did not partake of a crab of any description?" murmured Sholmes quietly.

"He must have done!" replied Pinkeye emphatically. "It fits in exactly with my theory. Besides, how otherwise would he have got the—er—collywobbles?"

Yawning gently, Sholmes raised his long, lean frame from the chair.

"Let us retire to our beds," said he. "May you bring the mystery of the green crab to a satisfactory end as speedily as you imagine, my dear Pinkeye!"

To my surprise, instead of seeking his bed, Herlock Sholmes spent a few minutes in the colonel's library. The book that attracted his attention was the "Cocklemouth-cum-Cookham and District Directory."

When he had carefully perused it, I inquired what he had been seeking. In response he merely gave a gruff chuckle, and poked his long forefinger playfully in the ribs.

On the following morning Colonel Curry-Cummerbund announced that he had an important appointment at a meeting held in connection with a sports tournament. Being President of the Cocklemouth-cum-Cookham Shove-ha'penny Club, he could not very well fail to turn up at the meeting when the date of the local autumn tournament was to be decided.

When the colonel had set off, appropriately dressed in a gay silk hat, immaculate wash-leather gloves, red and green blazer, white flannel trousers, yellow spats, and brown sand-shoes, and wearing a gilt ha'penny, souvenir of the last shove-ha'penny tournament, on his gunmetal watchchain, Sholmes and I discussed our plans for spending the morning.

"That fine sportsman, our host, has fired me with the desire to disport myself to-day, my dear Jotson," said Sholmes. "Let us purchase nets and go a-shrimping."

Hunting the elusive shrimp in the thunderous surf along the seashore appealed



Pinkeye shot four feet into the air, and an agonised howl left his lips. There was the green crab clinging to his coat tails.



MR. PROUT'S DILEMMA!

By BOB CHERRY.

THE funniest bathing yarn I know relates to Mr. Paul Prout, the master of the Fifth.

Once upon a time (as they say in the classics), when Greyfriars was sweltering in the grip of a heat wave, poor old Prouty plodded his perspiring way down to the sea, in order to cool his aged limbs in the water. He left his clothes behind a rock, and was soon enjoying the luxury of a bathe.

There was only one other person bathing at the time. This was a tramp. You don't often hear of a tramp taking kindly to cold water, but this particular tramp was an exception. He happened to come out of the water before Mr. Prout, and, seeing the Form master's "plus fours" and Norfolk jacket lying behind the rock, he promptly donned them, and made off!

When Prout had finished his dip, he was horrified to find that his togs had disappeared, and that a bundle of ragged and tattered garments had been left in their place.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Prout. "Some common tramp—some wandering nomad of

the highway—has had the effrontery to pilloin my clothes, and to leave these rags in exchange!"

Then, like Moses of old, Prout looked this way and that way, but there was no man. The tramp had disappeared, in all the glory of plus fours, Norfolk jacket, etc. In the breast-pocket of the jacket he had found a wallet containing a nice little sum, so he was on jolly good terms with himself as he swaggered away in the direction of Courtfield.

As for poor old Prout, there was only one thing to be done, and he did it. He donned the rags which the tramp had considerably left for him. The coat was terribly torn and tattered, and simply punctured with holes. There was a big patch at the seat of the trousers; and the shoes were awful, the soles having nearly parted company with the uppers. There was no collar or tie—just a highly-coloured muffler. A cheap cloth cap completed the equipment.

When Prout arrived at Greyfriars in that peculiar rig-out, he was unrecognisable as the master of the Fifth. Gosling, the porter, took him for a tramp, and at once ordered him to quit.

"You go along orf out of it!" growled Gosling. "We don't allow your sort in these ere allowed presinks."

"Imbecile!" snorted Prout. "Do you not recognise me?"

"My heye!" gasped Gosling, nearly falling down in his astonishment. "It's Mister Prout, as ever was! But wot are you doin' in that awful clobber, sir?"

Prout was in the act of explaining, when Harry Wharton & Co. came on the scene, bringing with them an unwilling prisoner—a person in plus fours and a Norfolk jacket.

"We captured this fellow in Courtfield, sir," said Wharton, addressing Mr. Prout. "We recognised your clothes, and wondered how he came by them. I suppose he stole them while you were bathing?"

"Precisely," said Prout. "I am very grateful to you, my boys, for taking this scoundrel into your custody. I have a good mind to hand him over to the police."

Prout did not, however, take this step. He exchanged clothes with the tramp, who was permitted to go on his way unpunished.

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to my mood, too. Leaving Howitzer House, Sholmes and I bought a brace of shrimpling-nets, and sauntered on to the beach. There we discarded our boots and stockings, and disported ourselves.

I was in the act of chasing a vigorous young cockle across some rocks when I heard a gruff voice. It was Inspector Pinkeye, who had come down to the pebbly beach.

Sholmes and I placed our nets down, and, donning our footwear, went to greet him.

"Well, what luck with the green crab mystery?" inquired Sholmes.

"Good progress, Mr. Sholmes," answered the inspector, smiling. "Anxious to trace the origin of the green crab that poor Benjamin Bagshaw must have eaten, I have questioned some of the honest fishermen of Cocklemouth. They informed me that a special variety of crab, bright green of colour, is sometimes caught in these waters. They hadn't any by them first thing this morning. When, however, I called again on them at ten o'clock, they were able to supply me with one."

He opened a wicker basket he had with him, and showed us a large live crab. It was grass green in hue, and had powerful claws which it waved threateningly.

With characteristic boldness, Sholmes took the crustacean by the back, and held it up for inspection with a powerful magnifying-glass.

"I see, my dear Pinkeye," he drawled. "This crab was given you by the honest fishermen?"

"I bought it," corrected Pinkeye. "Quite so," agreed Sholmes. "You 'bought it,' my dear fellow—with a vengeance! This is but an ordinary crab that has been dipped in a dye-tub!"

With a gesture of contempt, Sholmes tossed the crab on to a deck-chair, and took the wicker basket from Pinkeye's hand. "See, Pinkeye," he remarked, "you will notice that the sides of this basket are

streaked with the green dye rubbed from the crab's shell. Those honest fishermen have sold you a pup, if I may so describe the transaction."

Giving a deep groan, Pinkeye sank back into the deck-chair, and grasped his forehead in his hand. Next instant he shot four feet into the air, and an agonised howl left his lips.

"Yow! Ooops! Garoogh! I'm stung!" As he spun round we saw that the green crab was clinging affectionately to his coat-tail with its powerful claws.

"Yarooogh! Wow! Call it off!" shrieked Pinkeye, doing a war-dance. "Slaughter it!" "Keep calm—keep calm, my dear Pinkeye," he said. "I will then smite the ferocious crustacean with the deck-chair."

After accidentally awarding the unfortunate inspector half a dozen mighty thwacks with the chair, Sholmes eventually smote the crab, and caused it to let go its hold and scuttle hurriedly into the sea.

Heartrending were the moans of the unlucky inspector as he nursed his injured anatomy.

"Pinkeye," said Sholmes, "you cannot do without me, after all. Your theory of Bagwash's missing gold and his mysterious illness is all wrong. Come with me, my dear fellow."

Walking from the beach, Sholmes led the inspector and myself to the railway station. Here, to our astonishment, he bought three tickets for Little Sniggersby, an almost unknown village four miles distant. So well had Sholmes arranged everything, that we caught the only train that day, and duly arrived at Sniggersby two and a half hours after our departure from Cocklemouth.

In the straggling little village Sholmes stopped opposite an attractive hostelry almost hidden behind a large chestnut-tree and the outhouse of a fried-fish establishment.

"Note the signboard of the inn," commanded Sholmes quietly.

Pinkeye and I looked up, and an exclamation left our lips simultaneously.

"The Green Crab!"

"Yes," said Sholmes, smiling, "it is the Green Crab Inn, though the crab on the

signboard looks more like a spider. We will now go round the building. Remember the oft-repeated words of poor Benjamin Bagwash—'at the back of the Green Crab, under the shell.'"

"The shell!" echoed Pinkeye, utterly bewildered.

"This may prove to be a large fancy sea-shell, such as some people use on their garden rockeries," said Sholmes, "or it may be a brass shell-case, a souvenir of the Great War. The matter is quickly settled."

Sure enough, at the back of the Green Crab was a large fancy sea-shell, decorating the corner of a bed of sweet-smelling beet-roots. Without troubling to seek permission from the proprietor of the inn, Sholmes obtained a spade from a tool-shed. With it he dug under the shell.

Suddenly he stooped. When he rose upright again, he held in his hand a purse of golden sovereigns!

"The mystery is solved," he said. "When you mentioned the strange remark of Bagwash in hospital, Pinkeye, I shrewdly suspected he had an inn in mind. So I confirmed this by looking up a district directory, which showed the Green Crab licensed house was situated at Little Sniggersby. Doubtless the collywobbles with which Bagwash suffered were due to a prolonged visit to the Green Crab, followed by exposure to the fierce rays of the August sun. He succumbed into a gooseberry bush upon arriving home."

"But—but the gold!" stammered Pinkeye. "Why did he hide that behind the inn?"

"Clearly because he was afraid even that the charlady might rob him," replied Sholmes. "Evidently he is a very unpleasant old miser. He chose the ground under the shell to hide the money, because the shell formed a good mark to show its whereabouts."

"Amazing, Sholmes!" I gasped, overcome by admiration.

"A ridiculously simple case," answered Sholmes lightly. "We shall enjoy our holiday the better for knowing we have done a good turn to our old friend, the inspector."

THE END.