

THE SECRET IN THE PUDDING BAG!

(A Story of an Amazing Christmas Mystery recorded by
Herlock Sholmes himself.)

BEFORE revealing the amazing Secret of the Pudding Bag, I, Herlock Sholmes, detective of Shaker Street, London, desire to explain my action to the readers of the "Popular."

For years my faithful friend, Dr. Jotson, who assists me to pay Mrs. Spudson's exorbitant rent, had acted as the official recorder of my cases. Never was there a better man. Although a general practitioner, he is an expert on disordered brains. As I have told him many a time, he should be in a mental asylum—as house-surgeon, of course. Yet his great talents have not been wasted altogether in Shaker Street.

But his very devotion to me has one drawback. He refuses to record any but my astounding successes. And the case of the Pudding Bag can hardly be classified as one. But because of its Christmas flavour the Editor of the "Popular" desired it greatly—the story, not the pudding bag.

One day just after I had successfully solved the mystery of the Poisoned Doughnut, in Tooting Bee, I found the Great Man in our consulting-room at Shaker Street, begging Jotson to narrate the tale for the benefit of his million readers. Jotson refused. Therefore, I insisted on recording this amazing case myself.*



OR long Dr. Jotson had been run-down and depressed. Ever since that day when he left his best pair of silver-plated scissors inside the patient upon whom he had operated for liver trouble, he had not been himself.

For some time I must admit it did not occur to me that there was anything else wrong with poor

Jotson save worry for the loss of his patient and the scissors. But shortly before Christmas it was borne on me that something else was amiss.

One night as I sat in my armchair playing Schnoffenstein's Five-Finger Exercise in B Flat on my violin, curious rumbling noises assailed my ear. At first I thought the G string wanted tightening; then it occurred to me that the strange, deep sounds were proceeding from the next room.

I ceased playing. Creeping stealthily towards the bed-room door, my fiddle grasped in my right hand ready for any emergency, I stooped down with the skilled grace of long practice, and applied my ear to the keyhole.

Now I could hear the rumbling clearly. Dr. Jotson was talking to himself. Throwing open the door, I stood a tall and, I hope, dignified figure in my purple dressing-gown with the little green birds on the holly branches round the hem.

"Jotson!" I cried. "You are distraught!"

My old friend Jotson, who had been pacing the bed-room, stopped, his hands behind him. There was a startled look on his face, his sandy, walrus moustache drooping guiltily.

"Sholmes," he said, "you have been listening! What have you heard?"

"Aah!" I said. "What! Well might I ask you a question. What are you concealing from me, Jotson? What have you behind your back?"

"He, he, he! Only a couple of patches," replied Jotson, faintly laughing at his own

feeble joke. "Now pray go and resume your amateur vivisection on my guinea-pigs!"

Candidly, I felt offended, and I left the room. But I resolved to keep my eye on my old and faithful friend for any further symptoms before formally notifying Colney Hatch.

Gradually, as the days sped by, I became more convinced that Jotson was ailing mentally. Several times I heard him mumbling behind closed doors. Occasionally, too, he left the house in the evenings on some pretext or another. But I felt that when Jotson needed my help he would tell me. So I snuffed my cocaine, played my violin, and solved a couple of dozen poison mysteries which had baffled Scotland Yard and the Continental police, and temporarily left Jotson to look after himself.

On Christmas Eve Dr. Jotson made one more of his mysterious disappearances. For long I sat before the fire in the consulting-room, casually perusing the evening paper as I smoked my pipe. Outside the snow snowed and the waits waited—I was hard up that Christmas.

Suddenly a paragraph on an inner news page riveted my attention. It was headed: "Proposed River Trip for Crown Prince," and read: "The Crown Prince of Schlacca-Splittzen, who arrived this afternoon in London from Paris, has expressed a desire to see the London County Council Hall from the river. He remarked to reporters that his view of this magnificent structure from the railway reminded him of the municipal Torture House in Tchmnozzyte, the capital of his own state of Schlacca-Splittzen, which lies to the south of Russia. The Crown Prince is being carefully guarded by Inspector Pinkeye and three other well-known detectives from Scotland Yard. These precautions are being taken because it is rumoured that the Schlacca-Splittzen Co-operative Society of Anarchists have threatened to drop a bomb into his porridge if he visited Britain's shores."

As I read this little paragraph a dark suspicion entered my mind, and there I determined that Jotson must be watched.



IT was at eleven o'clock on Christmas Eve. Mrs.

Spudson, her hair in curl-papers, had retired to rest. I damped down the fire, covered the canary's cage, turned the consulting-room lights out, chained up the dog, put out the cat, and left the key under the front doormat for Jotson. Then I went to my room.

I was about to doff my dressing-gown when I heard Jotson enter the house. Slowly he came upstairs, and I heard him switch on the consulting-room light. Leaving my room, I crept along the passage and quickly opened the door of the consulting-room.

As I did so Jotson leaped from the hearth as though stung.

"Great porous plasters!" he gasped. "What a fright you gave me! For a moment I thought you were the ghost of Old Man Scrooge. You see, I've been attending the recital of the 'Christmas Carol.' He, he, he!"

The halting words of my old friend and his unmusical cackle told me he was not speaking the truth.

"Jotson," I said sternly, "you've no more been to any recital to-night than I've been to the tax-collector to pay next year's income-tax in advance. Now, tell me. Where have you been?"

As I spoke, my trained eye swept the fire-grate. From the flames and ashes which I saw there I deduced that Jotson had been burning something. Quickly I averted my gaze so that he should not know I knew.

My old friend tugged nervously at his moustache.

"It's nothing, really, my dear Sholmes," he said nervously. "If I told you, you would only laugh at me. And I hate being laughed at!"

"Nonsense, Jotson!" I said heartily. "Everyone laughs at you—er—except your patients, of course. And they usually don't last long enough to laugh long."

This I said in a gentle, bantering tone to cheer Jotson up. To my surprise, it seemed to have the opposite effect, and he stumped out of the room in a huff.

That was the opportunity I wanted. In a moment my nose was in the fender. Quickly I peered about. Before you could say "force-meat stuffing" I had found a narrow strip of torn paper bearing some typewritten words. Hearing Jotson's footsteps returning, I hastily crammed it in my pocket, and was innocently cracking Brazil nuts with my teeth when he entered the consulting-room to apologise for his former rudeness.

I said nothing about my discovery, but in my bedroom I examined the find carefully. To my stupefaction the typewritten words, which were in English, read as follows:

"... this honour. You have been chosen, comrade. See you fall not."



DING, dong! Clatter!

Bang! Ding, dong! The merry Christmas bells were chiming as Jotson and I met at breakfast on the following morning, and exchanged greetings.

My eagle eye was quick to notice that Dr. Jotson was not himself at breakfast. Quite absent-mindedly he helped me to the larger half

of the breakfast kipper, and then gave me the first cup from the coffee-pot, instead of the usual dregs. All my old fears for my poor friend's condition returned with renewed force.

Sitting in my chair, daintily flicking the kipper-bones from the lapel of my mauve dressing-gown, I watched Jotson as he went to the window and tried to entice the friendship of a robin redbreast by means of a fish-head.

"What do you say to a walk round Marylebone Station or the Waxworks, to get an appetite for our Christmas dinner, Jotson?" I remarked casually.

Jotson's walrus moustache gave a perceptible quiver.

"Er—I'm afraid you will have to excuse me, my dear Sholmes!" he stammered. "A new patient of mine, a dear old lady, who is suffering from a temporary attack of suspended vibration of the right bozookum, wishes me to test her high tension battery, to enable her to get 2EO for the Christmas glee singers I'm afraid—"

"Tut, tut!" I said. "I'll come with you, Jotson."

"No, my dear Sholmes," said Jotson, more firmly. "I shouldn't think of taking you to a case like this on Christmas Day. Why don't you take the bus up to the Zoological Gardens, or, if you prefer it, remain in front of the fire cracking a few monkey-nuts yourself?"

I said no more, but I thought a lot. For a time I sat myself in the armchair.

Speedily it became apparent that Jotson was up to some game. It seemed almost impossible to keep track of his movements. He was as slippery as an eel in an oil vat. But at last I heard him stealthily take his hat and coat from the peg in the hall and leave the house.

Within a minute I was tracking my old friend down Shaker Street. Dr. Jotson had a large brown paper parcel under his right arm. The parcel looked innocent enough.

What did that parcel contain? That I was determined to find out.

Poor Jotson was worried. I deduced that

(Continued on next page.)

* And on pocketing the fee usually awarded to poor Jotson.—Ed.



ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY:

Natually, deah boys, I shall spend Chwistmas at the home of my fathahs. There is somethin' vewy charmin', begad, in a Chwistmas at Eastwood House. My patah has given me permish to bwing as many St. Jim's fellahs as I like, so I have invited Tom Mewwy & Co., an' Figgy & Co., and my studay-mates, an' old Talbot—also Mawie Wivahs, the school nurse. Baggay Twimble is fufiuous with me for not invitin' him; but I told him quite fwankly that I wufuse to be eaten out of house an' home by a gweedy glutton who nevah knows where to stop! We shall twavel without Twimble, an' we mean to have the time of our lives at my patah's country seat. Yaas, waiwah!

MONTY LOWTHER:

Having been invited to Eastwood House by

that noble seion of the British aristocracy, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, I have jumped at the invitation. I have also received invitations to spend Christmas at Trimble Towers and Mellish Mansions; but as it is doubtful whether either of these places exist, I'm not going to forsake the substance for the shadow! Gussy's pater always gives us a jolly good time; and I have visions of glorious snow-fights (if there is any snow), thrilling man-hunts after burglars (if there are any burglars), and grim adventures with ghosts (if there are any ghosts). But whether there is a Christmas ghost at Eastwood House or not, there's bound to be "good spirits"!

BAGGY TRIMBLE:

That beast Gussy having turned down my kind offer to spend the Cristmas Vack at his

place, I suppose I shall have to spend it at Trimble Towers. But I don't like going home for Christmas, because my pater always has a lot of millionaire guests. Millionaires, as you know, are dispeptick. They can't eat turkey and plum-pooding. They have to be fed on dry toast and water. Groo! I can see myself wasting away to a shaddow during the Vack!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY:

Where shall I spend Christmas? At Grundy Grange, of course! And my two chums, Wilkins and Gunn, will accompany me. Grundy Grange is a quaint old Elizabethean manshun of the Tudor period, with its Roman walls still standing, and a mote running round it. The place simply swarms with spooks; but is George Alfred Grundy afraid of these midnite prowlers? Perrish the thought! I fear no foe in shining armor, and no ghost in flowing draperies, either!

EPHRAIM TAGGLES (the school porter):

It looks like bein' anything but a Merry Christmas for Your 'Umbles. Which I've got a shockin' bad cold, an' I dessay I shall spend Christmas in me lodge, with me pore tired feet in a mustard bath! Pity a pore old porter wot's sickenin' for the foor; an' don't forget, young gents, to give 'im a decent tip on breakin'-up day, in return for services rendered durin' the term. Thankin' you in anticipation, like, an' a Nappy Christmas to all that feels as tired as I do!

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from the absent-minded way that he pushed the face of a little boy who asked him for a cigarette-card. Stopping at the corner outside the Goat and Gooseberry Bush, he hesitated a moment, and then leaped on a passing bus. I waited until he had gone inside with his parcel; then I swung myself on the step and darted aloft.

Peering from the bus top, I saw Jotson alight at Charing Cross. I waited a few moments until the bus had started to move again, and then I ran nimbly down the steps. As I did so, with consummate cunning I knocked off the conductor's hat and leaped into the road. As he prepared to stop the bus I swiftly tossed him my own cap, and retrieved his fallen property. Then, replacing the peaked, blue cap on my head and gumming a false black moustache to my upper lip, I followed in the track of my old friend.

Once Jotson stopped and looked back. All he saw, apparently, was an attenuated bus-conductor about to turn into a near by chop-house.

Waiting in the shelter of the doorway a minute, I emerged and followed him again. As I watched his stocky form stumping down Whitehall towards the Houses of Parliament, a gust of wind blew the paper from under his arm. A white, earthenware pudding-basin was revealed, with a cloth over the top of it.

After a vain attempt to retrieve the paper Jotson went on his way, looking uncommonly foolish walking down Whitehall holding that pudding-cloth, with the basin swinging at his side.

At first the sight of that pudding-basin brought a sense of relief to me. Then a horrible thought occurred to me. This was no pudding-basin. It was a bomb! Rapidly I reviewed in my mind the events leading up to this Christmas morning walk. I remembered Jotson's curious mumbings. I remembered the paragraph about the Crown Prince of Schlaacca-Splittzen. I called to mind the mysterious message on the scrap of paper I had taken from the fire-grate. With a bomb in that innocent-looking bag, Jotson was on his way to the river to fulfil his dread mission.

My friend strode firmly to the Thames Embankment.

Quite a crowd was lining the parapet. "What's the excitement?" I heard him ask a low-looking ruffian.

"It's that there Crown Prince of Slaccy-Splittzen," replied the fellow. "He's just about to land at the jetty."

Jotson pushed his way through the crowd to the parapet. I kept close at his heels, my heart hammering against my ribs.

With a gasp of dismay I saw Jotson hoist the pudding-basin on to the parapet and give it a gentle shove.

"Stop!" I cried, and thrust my hand forward.

I must have diverted Jotson's aim, for the basin struck against a jutting ledge of the Embankment. There was no time to duck, for I feared the next moment there would be an explosion that would bring about the end of all things as far as we were concerned. To my surprise, however, the basin broke, and out shot a great plum-pudding. It struck a boatman standing on the jetty waiting for the prince's launch right on the back of the neck and burst into fragments, while the onlookers gasped with astonishment. Then, when they realised what had happened, a great shout of laughter burst forth. The boatman was annoyed—very! He looked aloft, with a great piece of pudding crowning his head, and passed a few remarks totally unconnected with that "peace on earth and good will to men" which one associates with the Yuletide season. Then, as the fellow turned to help with the mooring of the prince's launch, I grasped Jotson by the hand and dragged him away.

"You thundering idiot!" I said. "What do you mean by it all?"

"Sholmes!" cried Jotson. There was both surprise and disappointment in his tone.

And then bit by bit I dragged the story out of Jotson. He knew that Mrs. Spudson had made a Christmas pudding and that she would insist on him and me partaking of it at the Christmas dinner.

"Knowing your good nature, Sholmes," he said, "I knew that you would have eaten some of it to avoid offending our landlady. You did last year, and what was the consequence? For two days you groaned on the couch with the collywobbles. This year I determined at all costs I would get rid of the Christmas pudding. As a medical man I knew it was positively dangerous, but

I didn't want to drag you into the matter, nor did I wish to offend Mrs. Spudson. And so I quietly lifted the basin containing the pudding, intending to dispose of it in the first possible way that presented itself. As you know, in desperation I finally toppled it over into the river."

Then I told him how his rumblings had roused my suspicions, and the finding of the torn piece of typewritten paper had corroborated them.

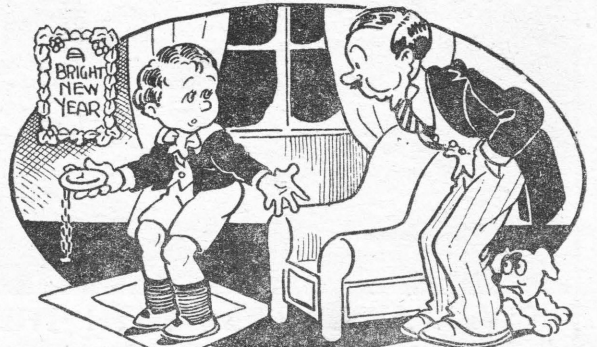
Now it was Jotson's turn to laugh. "Pon my word, Sholmes!" he chuckled. "I didn't know you were so worried about me! You see, a fortnight ago I joined the Marylebone Dramatic Society, and was offered the role of Koffittuppe in the play, 'Crown Jewels in Pawn,' by Msmooji, the famous Russian dramatist. Afraid you would laugh at me, I would retire to my bed-room to study my role. Finally, in disgust at my inability to learn the part, I tore it up and threw it on the fire. The typewritten piece of paper you found was a portion of the play."

"But why on earth didn't you tell me all this before, my dear fellow?" I cried.

"Because," answered Jotson, "I should have had to acknowledge failure, and, as you know, no man likes to do that."

"Ah, well," I laughed, "the mystery is solved! And we can safely return to Shaker Street to pull the wish-bone of a turkey without the fear of having to partake of any of the amazing stodge concoction which Mrs. Spudson calls Christmas pudding!"

THE END.



Teddie: "Oh, dad, this watch you gave me for Christmas won't go!"

Dad: "What! Won't go, and I paid quite a lot for it."

Teddie: "Y-yes, and it isn't as though I hadn't put all the wheels in the same place again."