

The Mystery of the Stockbroker's Clerk

(Copyrighted by A. Conan Doyle and Harper & Brothers.)

SHORTLY after my marriage I had bought a connection in the Pad-dington district. Old Mr. Farquhar, from whom I purchased it, had at one time an excellent general practice; but his age, and an affliction of the nature of St. Vitus' dance from which he suffered, had very much thinned it. The public not unreasonably goes on the principle that he who would heal others must himself be whole, and looks askance at the curative powers of the man whose own cure is beyond the reach of his drugs. Thus as my predecessor was old, and his practice declined, until when I purchased it from him it had sunk from 120 to little more than 300 a year. I had confidence, however, in my own youth and energy, and was convinced that in a very few years the concern would be as flourishing as ever.

For three months after taking over the practice I was kept very closely at work, and saw little of my friend Sherlock Holmes; for I was too busy to visit Baker street, and he seldom went anywhere himself save upon professional business. I was surprised, therefore, when, one morning in June, as I sat reading the "British Medical Journal," after breakfast, I heard a ring at the bell, followed by the high, somewhat strident tones of my old companion's voice.

"Ah, my dear Watson," said he, striding into the room, "am very delighted to see you! I trust that Mr. Watson has entirely recovered from all the little excitement connected with our adventure of the Sign of the Four?"

"Thank you, Mr. Holmes," said I, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"And I hope, also," he continued, sitting down in the rocking-chair, "that the course of medical practice have not entirely obliterated the interest which you used to take in our little deductive problems."

"On the contrary," I answered, "it was only last night that I was looking over my old notes, and classifying some of our past results."

"I trust you don't consider your collection closed?"

"Not at all. I should wish nothing better than to have some more of such experiences."

"Today, for example?"

"Yes, today, if you like."

"And as far as to Birmingham?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"And the practice?"

"I do my neighbor's when he goes. He is always ready to work."

"Has nothing could be better," said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and looking keenly at me from under his half-closed lids. "I am sure that you have been unwell lately. Summer colds are always a little trying."

"I was confined to the house by a severe chill for three days last week. I thought, however, that I had cast off every trace of it."

"So you have. You look remarkably robust."

"How, then, did you know of it?"

"My dear fellow, you know my methods."

"You deduced it, then?"

"And from what?"

"From your slippers."

I glanced down at the new patent-leather slippers which I was wearing. "How on earth—"

"My question before it was asked," answered Holmes, leaning forward. "Do you know your slippers are new?"

"You could not have had them more than a few moments before they were on my feet. I am sure that you are not a moment's time."

"Certainly, what is the case?"

"You shall hear in a moment. My client is outside in a four-wheeler. Can you come at once?"

"In an instant." I scribbled a note to my neighbor, rushed upstairs to explain the matter to my wife, and joined Holmes upon the doorstep.

"Your neighbor is a doctor," said he, nodding at the brass plate.

a week rise, and the duties just about the same as at Coxon's.

And now I come to the queer part of the business. It was in digging out Hampstead way, I got to the Terrace. Well, I was sitting down to a smoke that very evening after I had been promised the appointment, when up came my landlady with a card which had "Arthur Pinner, Financial Agent," printed upon it. I had never heard the name before and could not imagine what he wanted with me; but, of course, I asked her to show him in.

In he walked, a middle-sized, dark-haired, dark-eyed, black-bearded man, with a touch of the Hebrew about his nose. He had a brisk kind of way with him and spoke sharply, like a man who knew the value of time.

"Mr. Hall Pycroft, I believe," said he.

"Yes, sir," I answered, pushing a chair towards him.

"Lately engaged at Coxon & Woodhouse?"

"Yes, sir."

"And now on the staff of Mawson?"

"Quite so."

"Well," said he, "the fact is that I have heard some really extraordinary stories about your financial ability. You remember Parker, who used to be Coxon's manager? He can never say enough about it."

"Of course I was pleased to hear this. I had always been pretty sharp in the office, but I had never dreamed that I was talked about in the city in this fashion."

"You have a good memory," said he.

"Pretty fairly," I answered modestly.

"Have you kept in touch with the market while you have been out of work?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I read the stock exchange list every morning."

"Now that shows real application," he cried. "That is the way to prosper! You must mind my telling you, will you? Let me see. How are shares?"

"A hundred and six and a quarter to a hundred and five and seven-eighths."

"And New Zealand Consolidated?"

"A hundred and forty and a quarter to a hundred and thirty and seven-eighths."

"Seven to seven and six."

"Wonderful!" he cried, with his hands up. "This puts me in with all that I had heard. My boy, my boy, you may take much too good to be a clerk at Mawson's!"

"This outburst rather astonished me, as you can think. 'Well,' said I, 'other people don't think quite so much of me as you seem to do, Mr. Pinner. I had a hard fight to get this berth, and I am very glad to have it.'"

"Pooh, man; you should soar above it. You are not in your true sphere. Now, I'll tell you how it stands with me. What I have to offer is little enough when measured by your ability, but when compared with Mawson's, it's light as a feather. Let me see. When do you go to Mawson's?"

"On Monday."

"Ha, ha! I think I would risk a little sporting flutter that you don't go there at all."

"No, sir. By that day you will be the business manager of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, with 124 Corporation street, and here is the letter. Make a note of the address, 124 Corporation street, and remember that at 1 o'clock tomorrow is your appointment. Good night; and may you have all the fortunes that you deserve!"

That was just about all that passed between us, as near as I can remember. You can imagine, Watson, how pleased I was at such an extraordinary bit of good fortune. I sat up half the night hugging myself over it, and next day I was off to Birmingham in a train that would take me in plenty of time for my appointment. I took my things to a hotel on New Street, and then I wrote my note to the address which had been given me.

It was a quarter of an hour before my time, but I thought that would make no difference. I was a passenger between two large shops, which led to a winding stone stair, from which there were many flats, let as offices to companies of all sorts. The name of the occupant was painted at the bottom of the wall, but there was no such name as the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited. I stood for a few minutes with my heart in my boots, wondering whether the whole thing was an elaborate hoax or not, when up came a man and addressed me. He was very like the chap I had seen the night before, the same figure and voice, but he was clean-shaven and his hair was lighter.

"Are you Mr. Hall Pycroft?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh! I was expecting you, but you are a trifle before your time. I had a note from my brother this morning in which he says your arrival very loudly."

"I was just looking for the office when you came."

"We have not got our name up yet, for we only secured these temporary premises last week. Come up with me, and we will talk the matter over."

I followed him to the top of a very lofty stair, and there, right under the slates, were a couple of empty, dusty little rooms, uncarpeted and uncurtained, into which he led me. I had thought of a great office with shining tables and rows of clerks, such as I have used to, and I dare say I stared rather straight at the two deal chairs and one little table, which, with a ledger and a waste-paper basket, made up the whole furniture.

"Don't be disappointed, Mr. Pycroft," said my new acquaintance, seeing the length of my face. "Rome was not built in a day, and we must be content with our bare room for the present. We don't much dash yet in office. Pray sit down and let me have your letter."

"How?"

"You seem to have made a vast impression upon my brother Arthur," said he, "and I know that he is a pretty shrewd judge. He swears by London, you know; and I by Birmingham; but this time I shall follow his advice. Pray consider yourself definitely engaged."

"What are you intended to do about Mawson's?"

"I had forgotten all about Mawson's in my joy. 'I'll write and resign,' said I. 'Precisely what I don't want you to do. I had a row over you with Mawson's manager. I had gone up to ask him about you, and he was very offensive; accused me of coaxing you away from the service of the firm, and that sort of thing. At last I fairly lost my temper. 'If you want good men you should pay them a good price,' said I."

"He would rather have our small price than your big one," said he.

"I'll lay you a fiver," said I, "that house of Draper's Gardens, but they were let in early in the Spring through the Venezuela loan, as no doubt you remember, and came a nasty cropper."

He had been with me five years, and old Coxon gave me a ripping good testimonial when the smash came, but of course we were all turned adrift, the 27 of us. I tried here and tried there, but there were lots of other chaps on the same lay as myself, and it was a perfect frost for a long time. I had been taking three pounds a week at Coxon's, and I had saved about 70 of them, but I soon worked my way through that and out at the other end. I was fairly at the end of my tether at last, and could hardly find the stamps to answer the advertisements or the envelopes to stick them to. I had worn out my boots peddling up office stairs, and I seemed just as far from getting a billet as ever.

At last I saw a vacancy at Mawson & Williams, the great stock-broking firm in Lombard street. The pay was not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London. The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. Back came an answer by return, saying that if I would appear next Monday morning with my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. No one knows how these things are worked. Some people say that the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first

with the trades after the names of the people. I want you to take it home with you, and mark off all the hardware-sellers, with their addresses. It would be of the greatest use to me to have them."

"Surely there are classified lists?" I suggested.

"Not reliable ones. Their system is different from ours. Stick at it, and let me have the lists by Monday, at 12. Good-day, Mr. Pycroft. If you continue to show zeal and intelligence you will find the company a good master."

I went back to the hotel with the big book under my arm, and with very conflicting feelings in my breast. On the one hand, I was definitely engaged and had a hundred pounds in my pocket; on the other, the look of the office, the absence of name on the wall, and other of the points which would strike a business man had left a bad impression as to the position of my employers. However, come what might, I had my money, so I settled down to my task. All day Sunday I was kept hard at work, and yet by Monday I had only got as far as H. I went around to my employer's house in the same dismantled kind of room, and was told to keep at it until Wednesday, and then come again. On Wednesday it was still unfinished, so I hammered away until Friday—that is, yesterday. Then I brought it round to Mr. Henry Pinner.

"This is a very much," said he. "I fear that I underrated the difficulty of the task. This list will be of very material assistance to me."

"It took some time," said I.

"And now," said he, "I want you to make a list of the furniture shops, for they all sell crockery."

"Very good."

"And you can come up tomorrow evening at 7, and let me know how you are getting on. Don't overwork yourself. A couple of hours at Day's Music Hall in the evening would do you no harm after your labors." He laughed as he spoke, and I saw with a thrill that his second tooth upon the left-hand side had been very badly stuffed and was certainly not a natural one.

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

"He would rather have our small price than your big one," said he.

"I'll lay you a fiver," said I, "that house of Draper's Gardens, but they were let in early in the Spring through the Venezuela loan, as no doubt you remember, and came a nasty cropper."

He had been with me five years, and old Coxon gave me a ripping good testimonial when the smash came, but of course we were all turned adrift, the 27 of us. I tried here and tried there, but there were lots of other chaps on the same lay as myself, and it was a perfect frost for a long time. I had been taking three pounds a week at Coxon's, and I had saved about 70 of them, but I soon worked my way through that and out at the other end. I was fairly at the end of my tether at last, and could hardly find the stamps to answer the advertisements or the envelopes to stick them to. I had worn out my boots peddling up office stairs, and I seemed just as far from getting a billet as ever.

At last I saw a vacancy at Mawson & Williams, the great stock-broking firm in Lombard street. The pay was not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London. The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. Back came an answer by return, saying that if I would appear next Monday morning with my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. No one knows how these things are worked. Some people say that the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first

with the trades after the names of the people. I want you to take it home with you, and mark off all the hardware-sellers, with their addresses. It would be of the greatest use to me to have them."

"Surely there are classified lists?" I suggested.

"Not reliable ones. Their system is different from ours. Stick at it, and let me have the lists by Monday, at 12. Good-day, Mr. Pycroft. If you continue to show zeal and intelligence you will find the company a good master."

I went back to the hotel with the big book under my arm, and with very conflicting feelings in my breast. On the one hand, I was definitely engaged and had a hundred pounds in my pocket; on the other, the look of the office, the absence of name on the wall, and other of the points which would strike a business man had left a bad impression as to the position of my employers. However, come what might, I had my money, so I settled down to my task. All day Sunday I was kept hard at work, and yet by Monday I had only got as far as H. I went around to my employer's house in the same dismantled kind of room, and was told to keep at it until Wednesday, and then come again. On Wednesday it was still unfinished, so I hammered away until Friday—that is, yesterday. Then I brought it round to Mr. Henry Pinner.

"This is a very much," said he. "I fear that I underrated the difficulty of the task. This list will be of very material assistance to me."

"It took some time," said I.

"And now," said he, "I want you to make a list of the furniture shops, for they all sell crockery."

"Very good."

"And you can come up tomorrow evening at 7, and let me know how you are getting on. Don't overwork yourself. A couple of hours at Day's Music Hall in the evening would do you no harm after your labors." He laughed as he spoke, and I saw with a thrill that his second tooth upon the left-hand side had been very badly stuffed and was certainly not a natural one.

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure of the man, and only those things which he said, I was able to put him in a room, and I was able to find him."