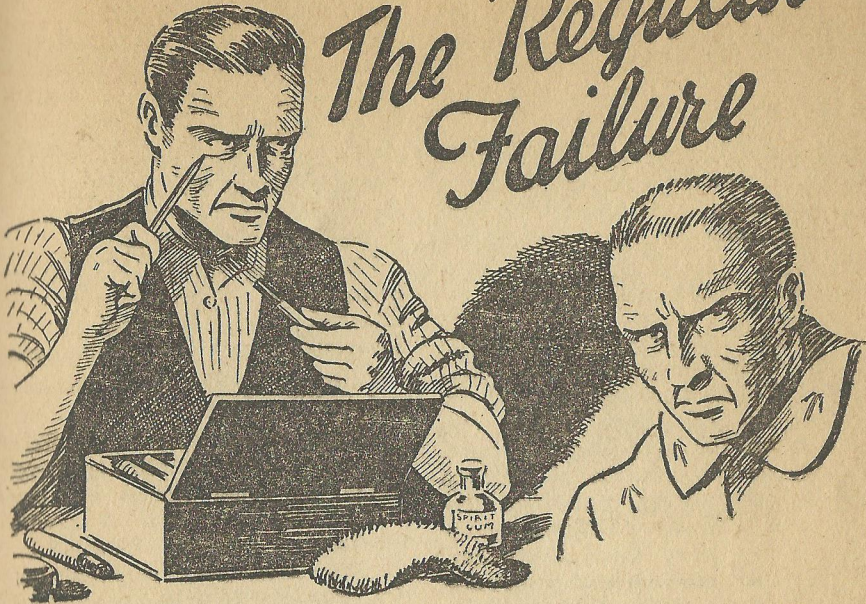


THE CASE OF

The Regular Failure



“**B**EAUTIFUL night this is—I don’t think! Reckon I ’shan’t be sorry when it’s time for the relief.”

A stalwart constable muttered the words to himself as he paced slowly on his beat through Crayleigh Gardens, flashing a circular patch of light from his bull’s-eye lantern ahead of him in a vain endeavour to pierce the dense, swirling fog.

“It’s a proper plateful of peasoup,” he murmured disgustedly. “No night for honest folk to be out.”

There was reason for the complaint. A dense cloud of choking, black fog hung over the Metropolis; fog that made the throat feel raw and the eyes smart painfully.

A beastly night, and yet there was one man abroad in Crayleigh Gardens who found the weather admirably suited to his purpose. Standing by the railings on the opposite side of the road, Jake Bolton heard the constable’s steps

fade away, and he laughed softly under his breath.

“Just the sort of night I likes,” he chuckled. “Couldn’t ’ave been better if it ’ad been made for me.”

Strange words perhaps, but Jake Bolton was not one of those who came within the scope of the constable’s remark concerning “honest folk.” He was tall and massively built, with wide powerful shoulders. His coarse-featured face, with the square, protruding chin and low brow, expressed brutality; and there was a mixture of cruelty and cunning in the glitter of his pale, grey-blue eyes.

Bolton looked what he was—a crook—and a dangerous one at that. Once in his youth he had made a careless slip, with the result that he had served a term of imprisonment. Since that time, profiting by experience, he had been wary, and managed to keep on the right side of the prison bars, although he had crimes innumerable to his account.