

THE STRAND MAGAZINE



A REMINISCENCE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

The Adventure

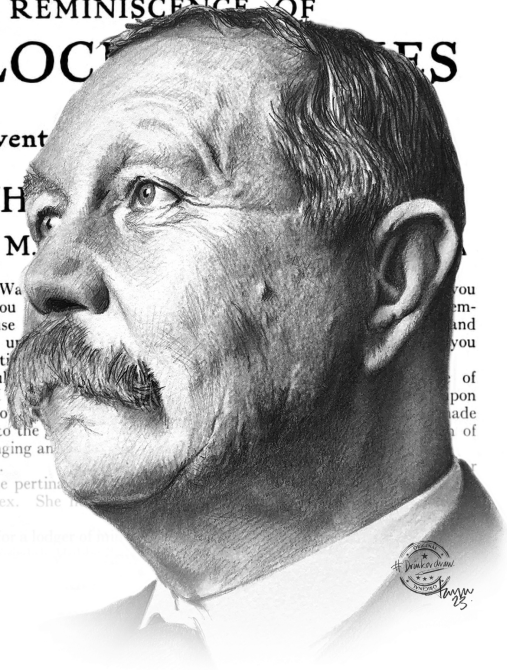
By ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Illustrated by H. M. WOOD

“WELL, Mrs. Watson, I can see that you are very particular about this case, but I do not understand it. I, whose business it is to value, should not care for the matter. I have other things to engage me.” So said Sherlock Holmes, and turned back to the book in which he was arranging and classifying some of his recent material.

But the landlady had the pertinacity of also the cunning, of her sex. She was not ground firmly.

“You assumed an affair for a lady at last.”



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Canadian Holmes

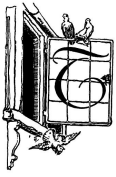
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Graces of Bootprints

Among the long list of authors who have written for *Canadian Holmes*, it's a fact that Bill Gates, co-founder of the software giant Microsoft, is not one of them. However, about 20 years ago when discussing the early days of the internet he famously declared, "Content is King." Although not known to be a Sherlockian, Gates couldn't have been more correct, especially when it comes to a journal like this one.

After each issue is distributed, it's not unusual to hear back from subscribers about a particular article that has resonated with them. It may have been about ACD, or about the Reichenbach Falls, or almost any other topic. There seems to be no single subject that receives the most attention. The reader will almost always share their thanks for the journal and, of course, mention the article that they most enjoyed.

To give credit where it's due, the authors are the ones who produce the articles, columns and reviews that appear in these pages quarterly. As writers, they're the ones who channel their creativity and interest in a topic and decide to share it. If you have an idea you'd like to explore and write about, how about dropping a line? *Canadian Holmes* is eager to welcome new voices and new views and happy to work with well-seasoned authors or first time contributors. After all, this journal strives to be a showcase for writers, reviewers, lyricists and toasters in Canada and beyond.

In this issue, regular contributors Daniel L. Friedman and Eugene B. Friedman explore the origins of the "The Speckled Band," and hissing is encouraged while reading this one. Nawazali A. Jiwa makes his journal debut with an article about Sherlock Holmes and circumcision. UK Sherlockian Kelvin Jones shares the importance of the River Thames in both his own family history and in the Canon. The insightful content continues with Barbara Rusch's column looking at shipwrecks, John Gehan's tongue-in-cheek toast about the pack horse, and Sonia Fetherston's focus on chairs in the Canon. In his column, Mark Jones tackles a Brazilian cat. The early days of *The Bootmakers* is examined in both a letter to the editor from Jim Ballinger and a poem by the late Cameron Hollyer titled "The Birth of the Bootmakers." Don Roebuck also adds to the discussion with his analysis of the national club's motto and what it means. Book reviews and Diary Notes round out your reading during these warmer months and longer days.

The view from the bow window

Barbara Rusch explores various aspects of Victorian and Edwardian life as they relate to the canonical tales. Bow Window illustration by Laurie Fraser Manifold.



They that go down to the sea in ships and do their business in great waters ... see ... the wonders of the Lord in the deep.” So we learn from Psalm 107. Indeed, the business of shipbuilding saw its origins in biblical times. The earliest evidence of maritime navigations dates from the 30th century B.C.E., when the Egyptians sailed the Red Sea. The first ship recorded by name was the *Praise of the Two Lands*, built of cedar wood in 2613 B.C.E. Five hundred years later, the Phoenicians were constructing large merchant ships, and are regarded as the first true seafarers. Explorers like Magellan, the first to circumnavigate the globe, Marco Polo, who returned from the Orient laden with spices and other delicacies, and Columbus, whose discovery of America was undoubtedly preceded by the Vikings (Scandinavian for “pirates”) by a few centuries, all discovered new worlds and mapped hitherto uncharted trade routes. During the reign of Elizabeth I, naval hero Sir Francis Drake, whose *Golden Hind* helped defeat the Spanish Armada, turned privateer, looting foreign ships and plundering seaports for treasure and supplies. Throughout the centuries, battles have been fought over naval power and fishing rights. By the 18th century, much of the economy of the American south derived from the slave trade by way of the “Middle Passage.”

Queen Victoria’s 63-year reign confirmed Britain’s supremacy of the seas, both in peacetime and in war. “Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves” became a literal and metaphorical proclamation and England’s unofficial anthem. Steam-powered ships helped further the aims of the East India Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company in Canada, established three centuries before, where raw materials and precious natural resources were siphoned off and shipped back to the mother country. Isambard Kingdom Brunel performed feats of engineering as grandiose as his name suggests. His ship, *The Great Eastern*, laid the first trans-Atlantic cable, thereby facilitating communications between Europe and North America. Clipper ships sailed around Cape Horn from the

eastern ports of the United States to the newly discovered gold fields of California, removing the necessity of an arduous journey overland. The replacement of wooden vessels with faster and more comfortable metal-clad steamships allowed for mass colonization and immigration, encouraging millions to flee appalling conditions and religious persecution to seek refuge in Western Europe and North America. By the 20th century, ocean liners, essentially luxury hotels afloat, were ferrying passengers across the pond, who, like Mary Maberley, were about to embark on a grand tour.

Of course, not all ocean-going vessels that made their way across the Atlantic found safe harbour. In the 19th century alone, there were over 150 recorded shipwrecks, the result of weather conditions, faulty design or human error. Forty years before the ship that became synonymous with disaster, *Titanic*, another steamer of the White Star Line, the *Atlantic*, crashed into the rocks and sank off the coast of Nova Scotia with the loss of 545 lives. The *Mary Celeste*, a Canadian-built, American brigantine, was found unaccountably adrift and abandoned in the Atlantic Ocean. Conan Doyle's short story "J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement," was based on the famous ghost ship, the fate of its crew a mystery to this day.

Ships are central to the Canonical tales, carrying with them metaphorical cargo of a dramatic nature. Amongst the 15 steamships and launches, barques and yawls is the unchronicled tale of the *Matilda Briggs*, associated with the intriguing giant rat of Sumatra. Watson regarded the *Gloria Scott*, pressed into service as a convict ship transporting prisoners to Australia, significant enough to memorialize it with its own story title. Some marine vessels are no more than harbingers of disaster. The *Friesland* nearly cost Holmes and Watson their lives. Maritime crafts often have a way of meting out their own brand of retributive justice when the outcome is out of Holmes's hands. The *Norah Creina*, believed to be conveying the surviving members of the Worthington Bank Gang, was lost at sea. Likewise the barque *Lone Star*, with its connections to the murders of the Openshaws, was presumed destroyed in a gale. The names of some canonical boats reflect the characters of those who served on their decks. The violent James Browner was steward aboard the *May Day*, spelled as one word the universal signal of impending disaster, while Jack Croker, Mary Fraser's protector, was first officer on the *Rock of Gibraltar*, symbol of immutable strength and solidity.

The glory that was the British Empire could never have come to pass had it not been for her ships that ruled the waves. As for the "wonders of the Lord," Holmes might well add, "These are deep waters, indeed."



This rare and seldom seen illustration by Walter W. Francis was created in 1905 for The San Francisco Call when that newspaper was running a serialization of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

A bespectacled milk-loving serpent: The Origins of The Speckled Band

By Daniel L. Friedman and Eugene B. Friedman

Dan and Eugene Friedman are practising pediatricians and the authors of Doyle's World: Lost and Found.

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him.

The Speckled Band

It is human nature to have some favourites – a favourite person, place, or even thing. Doctors have favourite patients, lawyers have favourite court cases, and teachers have favourite students. Writers, too, have favourites – favourite stories – some written by others, some of their own creation. Conan Doyle was no exception to this rule. He regarded “The Speckled Band” as his number one pick in the entire Sherlock Holmes Canon, going as far as to boldly assert that his “grim snake story... will be on every list.” And rightfully so. This tale is woven with an intricate tapestry of murder, a diabolical villain, and unforgettable dialogue such as: “When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge.”

The narrative, with its gripping and compelling storyline, is adorned with manufactured information about the eerie weapon that was to be used to commit murder – a deadly snake. Apparently, our beloved consulting detective held some rather curious yet spurious beliefs concerning these creatures. At the conclusion of “The Speckled Band,” Holmes tells Watson that Dr. Roylott employed a low-pitched whistle to “recall the snake” from his stepdaughter’s room and then postulated that the evil physician had “trained it, probably by the use of the milk.” Although Holmes winds up being correct, his hypothesis is based on a charming, but highly inaccurate, series of assumptions.

Where did Conan Doyle, a man of science who read virtually anything he could get his hands on, acquire such misinformation? Did he stoop to

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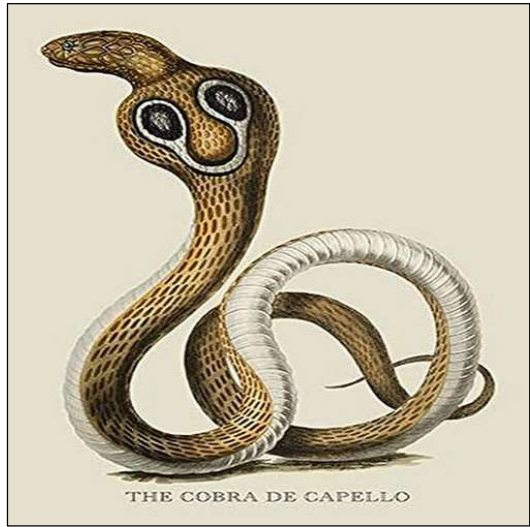
WAITING FOR THE BOAT.

fabricating details that would conveniently fit his story's plot and serve as red herrings, or did he genuinely believe what he put down in print? For instance, Dr. Roylott was the proud owner of an exotic cat, specifically a cheetah, and as Holmes so unequivocally states, "a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants." This raises the question of whether Conan Doyle's depiction of the snake's behaviour was a deliberate invention or whether it was a true reflection of his own understanding when he wrote it.

In the early 1890s, when Conan Doyle could be found at his desk writing what would become his favourite Sherlock Holmes adventure, there had already been a few scientific articles that contained the "facts" that are the foundation for "The Speckled Band." In particular, a scholarly article written by Alexander Young which appeared in the 1872 edition of *Appletons' Journal of Literature* bearing the title "The Cobra de Capello"

could have (or even would have) served as Conan Doyle's primary source of knowledge about venomous Indian snakes.

Young's serpentine article opens by stating that "one of the most dangerous of venomous serpents is the celebrated cobra de capello, or hooded snake, so called from its habit of dilating the neck into a kind of hood partially covering the head. As this hood is



curiously marked in the centre in black and white, like a pair of spectacles, the cobra is sometimes called the spectacled snake... Its general color is a brownish yellow of various degrees of brightness." Compare those words with Watson's description of the serpent he had spent a few harrowing moments with: "Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head... In an instant his strange headgear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent." The bespectacled snake described by Watson and Young independently is capable of dilating its neck, being brownish-yellow in colour, and injecting extremely lethal venom into its victim. This would indicate that Watson was describing the menacing cobra de Capello, rather than the non-existent species of swamp adder, a reptile conjured up by Conan Doyle and mentioned by Holmes.

Young's article goes on to recount that "the knowledge of the habits and tastes of the cobra, combined with great presence of mind, proved very useful to an Englishman" when, while engaged in a game of whist, he discovered this creature wrapped around his leg. In order to lure the snake away, he calmly instructed his fellow cardplayers "to stay perfectly still, so as not to irritate the snake. He then "told an attendant to place a saucer of milk, of which it is very fond," near his chair. "These directions having been complied with, the cobra, on recognizing the milk, quietly unwound itself from the whist player's leg, and his life was saved." While this anecdote rests on certain grains of truth, some fundamental facts still remain – snakes are not mammals – they do not require, drink, or have an

affinity for milk. Conan Doyle probably used Young's vignette about a snake being lured away from a potential victim with a saucer of milk when he wrote this tale of horror.

Young's article states that cobra de capellos can be "tamed and domesticated" and, as a result, are "the snake frequently exhibited by Indian jugglers, who contrive to make it perform graceful movements to the sound of music." He then informs us that "snake-charmers control the cobras, not by depriving it" of its fangs, "but by courageously availing themselves of its well-known timidity and reluctance to use them." Young also suggests that when the cobra de capello "is irritated by the sudden stopping of the music," it might dart "at the throat of a young woman." These so-called facts, that snakes have good hearing and respond to musical sounds, detailed by Young are somewhat preposterous. Snakes, as a species, lack external ear canals, and while they do possess some of the bones required for hearing, these ossicles are underdeveloped, and incapable of interpreting musical notes, including those of a whistle. And yet, Conan Doyle endows his venomous serpent with these precise qualities which were to become important clues in "The Speckled Band." Startlingly, Young's article offers an exact description of the snake found in Conan Doyle's tale. It is a deadly brownish yellow spectacled serpent, one endowed with exceptional auditory ability, that has not only been domesticated, but is also fond of drinking milk from a saucer.

Young tells his readers that the venom of a cobra de capello is usually fatal "unless a remedy is speedily applied." One of those remedies involves pouring "heavy doses of brandy" down the victim's throat. When we are provided with the details surrounding Julia Stoner's (the sister of Holmes's client's) death we learn that brandy was used medicinally in the moments before her untimely demise. And so, we have another piece of information used by Conan Doyle that is found in Young's article.

Young also makes it a salient point to mention that the king cobra is "so light a color that at a distance it seems like a silvery white." This observation makes it clear that the snake Watson and Holmes encountered was not a king cobra at all but rather, its close relative, the cobra de capello. That Dr. Roylott had a pet snake at all suggests that it must have belonged to the cobra family, and not to the adder, as snakes that are kept in captivity usually refuse to eat, that is, with the exception of the cobra. And yet, it was convenient for Holmes to have suggested that the snake was a member of the adder family, as it is the only venomous serpent found in Great Britain.

The question now arises: Was Conan Doyle of the opinion that snakes had excellent hearing, were trained with the aid of milk served in saucers,

and retrievable with the use of whistles? The answers to these questions will never be known, but what is a fact is that this was not the first time Conan Doyle wrote about serpents.

When Conan Doyle was a medical student in late spring of 1879, he served as an apprentice to Edinburgh-trained Birmingham physician Reginald Ratcliff Hoare. During his first few weeks at Hoare's office, Conan Doyle began to experience debilitating headaches and decided to take advantage of his preceptor's laboratory. The young physician-in-training boiled jasmine root and extracted gelsemium, an herbal remedy thought to ameliorate his neuralgia. Doyle incrementally increased the dose of this strong analgesic, and meticulously recorded its physiological effects on him— both therapeutic and toxic. Unfortunately, within a few days, he began experiencing diarrhea and abdominal pain, which led him to become severely dehydrated. Nevertheless, he continued on with his self-experimentation, that is, until two “aspiring geniuses”— Hoare's other medical assistants, Dr. Hughes and Smith – ratted him out. This forced Dr. Hoare to attend to his sick employee, and to Hoare's wife Amy, demanding that Conan Doyle write a confession to his mother about his irresponsible behaviour. More incredibly, Conan Doyle wasn't dismissed by Dr. Hoare. Just the opposite – he was embraced by the family (because of his unique ability to charm Hoare's children with ghostly tales) and was invited to return year after year. But Conan Doyle, humiliated by the situation he had created, decided to pursue a little ‘harmless’ revenge on his two saviours. Doing what he did best, Conan Doyle took out paper and pen and wrote “a most preposterous case... about an eel... told most gravely and scientifically” and submitted it to the prestigious medical journal, *The Lancet* crediting “Hues and Smith” with its authorship. Although the scholarly article was rejected by discerning editors of this respected publication, certain claims made by Conan Doyle in that article might have been repurposed in “The Speckled Band.” (1)

Conan Doyle had already made allusions to snakes in the second of the Holmes novels, *The Sign of Four*, when Jonathan Small, recounting his first meeting with the cannibal Tonga, describes him as being “as venomous as a young snake.” And in his first Holmes short tale, “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Conan Doyle masterfully conjures up the fictional Serpentine Avenue address along with its mews, as well as having King Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein offering his precious “emerald snake ring” as a gift to Holmes. And, as expected, when Conan Doyle created Holmes's most deadly enemies, he endowed them with snake-like qualities. Professor Moriarty is described as having a face that protrudes forward, “forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a

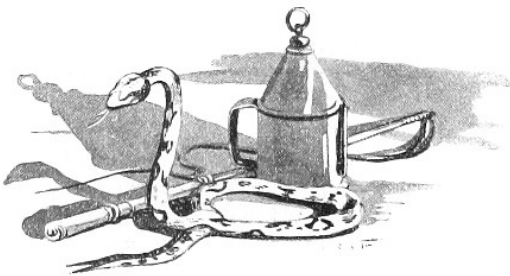
curiously reptilian fashion.” Also when Holmes tells Watson about the repulsive blackmailer Charles Augustus Milverton, he uses this analogy: “Do you feel a creeping, shrinking sensation, Watson, when you stand before the serpents in the Zoo and see the slithery, gliding, venomous creatures, with their deadly eyes and wicked, flattened faces? Well, that’s how Milverton impresses me.”

Contained within the narrative of “The Speckled Band” is Watson’s declaration that he was an ardent admirer of Holmes’s “rapid deductions” because they were “always founded on a logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him.” Nonetheless, this was not entirely true. In this particular case, it was Holmes’s flawed understanding of snake behavior that inadvertently allowed him to solve the mystery. Holmes incorrectly believed that the snake could be trained with milk and recalled by a whistle, which, while scientifically inaccurate, fit perfectly into the puzzle he was attempting to solve. This misapprehension led him to uncover the truth about Dr. Roylott’s nefarious use of the snake as a murder weapon.

Conan Doyle’s literary alchemy goes well beyond mere storytelling; it serves as a portal for contemporary readers to immerse themselves in the scientific zeitgeist of the time. His nuanced inclusion of serpentine symbolism heightens the mystery of the adventure and informally invites the reader to open the doors to the explosive growth of biological knowledge, a testament to Conan Doyle’s dedication to authenticity in the realm of Holmesian deduction.

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(1) Stashower, Daniel et. al., *Conan Doyle, Arthur, A Life in Letters*, The Penguin Press, 2007, pg116-117.



To the forgotten Hero/Heroine. Maybe neither.

By John Gehan

Editors's note: This tongue-in-cheek poem was first presented to the Bootmakers at a June 2021 meeting.

Without Doctor Watson we would probably never have heard of Sherlock Holmes. What a difference that would have made. Why some of us might not even own a bookcase. Many dear friends we would never have met. Yes, our lives would be much different.

We all know the story. Watson joins the army out of medical school, shipped out to India where he is badly wounded at the ill-fated battle of Maiwand and rescued from a hideous death by his orderly Murray. Invalided out of the army, wasting away in London looking for cheap lodging.

A chance encounter with a former dresser, Stamford, hooks him up with Sherlock Holmes and we all know the rest.

But is that the whole story? Are we not overlooking a crucial figure involving Watson's rescue from certain death?

Did Murray carry our friend to safety? He most certainly did not. No, he had assistance. Without this assistance both Watson and Murray might have perished.

Who are we forgetting? Why the horse of course. The noble beast that saved the day. Made it back to friendly territory with the good doctor slung across his back. And his reward? Probably ended up in a glue pot at the Priory School.

My fellow Bootmakers, a toast to one we owe much to. The pack horse.

The Circumcision of Sherlock Holmes

By Nawazali A. Jiwa

Nawazali A. Jiwa has been fascinated with Sherlock Holmes ever since his late father gifted him the Canon. This fascination was intensified when Tony Fell (formerly of MacEwan University) introduced him to Sherlockian pastiches, and even more so after Merrill Distad (Librarian Emeritus University of Alberta) acquainted him with the Grand Game.

Male circumcision is defined as the “surgical removal of the foreskin, a hood of tissue that covers the end of the penis.” (1) It is performed for a variety of reasons including as a rite of passage particularly in the “Jewish and Islamic faiths.” (2) The issue of the circumcision of Sherlock Holmes is traced back to his travels to Mecca during the Great Hiatus. Non-Muslims are prohibited from entering the city, which has been the case for centuries—and still is. Sir Richard F. Burton (amongst others) managed to penetrate Mecca disguised as a native Muslim in the early 1850s. (3) Therefore, it has been generally assumed that Holmes also entered Mecca using the same means in the early 1890s.

Evan M. Wilson writes that in order to circumvent “being detected ... we *must* assume that he [Holmes] would have been circumcised” (emphasis added). (4)

In her monograph on Holmes’s sojourn in Mecca, Anne Jordan is more cautious:

How far he [Holmes] took his disguise is an interesting question? All Muslim males are circumcised and certainly Burton underwent the necessary surgery before he visited Mecca. There is no way of knowing if Holmes went this far but it is certainly a possibility. (5)

Marshall S. Berdan too shares the same concern as Wilson and Jordan, and in a footnote adds that:

One of the preemptive precautions that Holmes would have had to seriously consider taking would be to have had himself circumcised, a mandatory Muslim coming-of-age ritual ... (6)

The obvious question is: How do these authors *know* that Holmes was uncircumcised? Berdan goes a step further by providing the following rationale for the assumption:

Most nineteenth-century British males, however, were not circumcised, and Burton himself apparently underwent the procedure—which is much more painful and takes substantially longer to heal when done as an adult—shortly after his conversion to Islam in the late 1840s. (7)

However, from approximately 1850 until about 1930, (8) there was a “sudden vogue for male circumcision in Victorian Britain.” (9) This comes from a study by Robert Darby titled *A Surgical Temptation: The Demonization of the Foreskin and the Rise of Circumcision in Britain*. The various factors that gave rise to this phenomenon need not detain the discussion. What is important to understand is that circumcision was used to treat a wide array of conditions. These conditions, some of which had a greater impact on the popularity of the practice than others, included: masturbation, spermatorrhea (an imaginary disease), congenital phimosis (an imaginary disease), syphilis, penile cancer, penile hygiene, tuberculosis, epilepsy, and bed-wetting. (10)

Other conditions that “many physicians in the nineteenth century claimed circumcision” (11) could treat included: spinal paralysis, paralysis of the bladder, curvature of the spine, clubfoot, crossed eyes, blindness, alcoholism, gout, asthma, rheumatism, headaches, and hernia.

It is possible that Holmes was affected by any one of these maladies and was potentially circumcised at any age from infancy to adulthood. It is also possible that Holmes underwent the procedure when he was “severely ill” as a boy. (12) After all, “the parents would be considered the client and there was no need to consult the wishes of the actual patient.” (13)

In sum, there are three immediate possibilities:

- i. Holmes visited Mecca without being circumcised deciding to ‘risk it.’
- ii. Holmes voluntarily submitted to a circumcision during the Great Hiatus and shortly before he entered Mecca.
- iii. Holmes (voluntarily or involuntarily) submitted to a circumcision *before* the Great Hiatus at an undetermined age.

Possibility (i) is unlikely as at the time, the penalty for trespassing Mecca and impersonating a Muslim was “being done to death.” (14) Holmes, who insisted upon the necessity of precautions on multiple occasions in the Canon, would not expose himself so unnecessarily.

Possibility (ii) is what has been generally assumed up to now. Holmes would have made allowance for the fact that the ‘wound’ takes some time to heal.

Possibility (iii) is as equally plausible as possibility (ii) because they are both based on assumptions. Admittedly, the evidence presented for possibility (iii) is largely circumstantial. However, as the Master himself once stated, “circumstantial evidence is occasionally very convincing.” (15) The intent of this paper is to convince Sherlockians to be as open to possibility (iii) as they are to possibility (ii).

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- (1) Rothfeld, Glenn S. and Romaine, Deborah S., “Circumcision,” in *The Encyclopedia of Men’s Health*, Facts on File, New York, 2005, p.88.
- (2) *ibid.*,
- (3) Even though Burton converted to Islam before his journey to Mecca, he opted to infiltrate the region incognito.
- (4) Wilson, Evan M., “The Trip That Never Was or Sherlock Holmes in the Middle East,” *Baker Street Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1970), p.71.
- (5) Jordan, Anne, *I Looked in at Mecca: An Insight into Sherlock Holmes’ Visit to Mecca*, Northern Musgraves, Halifax, West Yorkshire, 1993, p.8.
- (6) Berdan, Marshall S., “Haji Holmes or You, Too, Have Been in Afghanistan, We Perceive,” *Baker Street Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (2002), p.24n8.
- (7) *ibid.*
- (8) This corresponds to the time period spanning from shortly before Holmes’s birth up to his retirement on the Sussex Downs.
- (9) Darby, Robert, *A Surgical Temptation: The Demonization of the Foreskin and the Rise of Circumcision in Britain*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005, p.3.
- (10) It is of interest to note that circumcision as a cure for bed-wetting was recommended by a surgeon no less than Dr. Joseph Bell. See Bell, Joseph, “Nocturnal Incontinence of Urine Cured by Circumcision,” *Edinburgh Medical Journal* Vol. 1, No. 9 (1873), p.1034.
- (11) Wisdom, Travis, “Constructing Phallic Beauty: Foreskin Restoration, Genital Cutting and Circumcisionism,” in McNamara, Sallie (ed.), *(Re)Possessing Beauty: Politics, Poetics, Change*, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2014, p.94.
- (12) Baring-Gould, William S., *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street: A Life of the World’s First Consulting Detective*, Popular Library, Toronto, 1963, pp. 18–19.
- (13) Darby, p.69.

(14) Jeffery, Arthur, "Christians at Mecca," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1929), p.221.

(15) "The Noble Bachelor"



Diary Notes continued from page 40

In 1939, he was in *The Son of Frankenstein*. Also that year he played Sherlock Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Top billing in the movie went to Richard Greene. His friend Nigel Bruce played Watson. Rathbone and Bruce went on to appear in 13 more movies about Sherlock Holmes, where they were the stars. There was also a radio series which had produced 220 half-hour episodes when Rathbone left.

He tried to restart his stage career but was hampered by being typecast as Sherlock Holmes. He did get a role in a play on Broadway for which he won a Tony Award for Best Actor.

He gave a lecture series about his life that was popular.

In 1953, his wife Ouida, wrote a play about Sherlock Holmes in which Rathbone starred. It closed after three performances.

He made television commercials for Prudential Insurance, Schaefer Beer and Skippy Peanut Butter.

Basil Rathbone died on 21 July 1967.

After his presentation John answered some questions.

Mike then introduced our next speaker, Roger Johnson. Roger is a member of The Sherlock Holmes Society of London. He is the press and publicity officer and editor of the society's *Sherlock Holmes Journal*. He is also a member of the Baker Street Irregulars and, with his wife Jean Upton, a custodian of the legendary 221B Baker Street sitting room at the Sherlock Holmes Pub. He is the author of several books and articles on Sherlock Holmes, and other subjects, including "The Sherlock Holmes Miscellany" and "In the Night in the Dark."

The title of his presentation was, "SH: The Exhibition, the Society and the Pub."

Roger said that shortly after the end of the Second World War, Great Britain decided to have The Festival of Britain to improve public morale.

The Council of Marylebone originally wanted to have a display about

Continued on page 35

That Murky Graveyard, The River Thames

By Kelvin Jones

Kelvin I. Jones is the author of numerous books and articles on the Great Detective. His work includes The Sherlock Holmes Murder File, The Annotated Hound of the Baskervilles and others. He has written a Doyle biography Conan Doyle & The Spirits and the recently published The Uncanny Worlds of Conan Doyle. He lives in the Devil's Foot country of Cornwall, UK.

It was a little past seven before we reached the Westminster wharf, and found our launch awaiting us. Holmes eyed it critically.

“Is there anything to mark it as a police-boat?”

“Yes,—that green lamp at the side.”

“Then take it off.”

The small change was made, we stepped on board, and the ropes were cast off. Jones, Holmes, and I sat in the stern. There was one man at the rudder, one to tend the engines, and two burly police-inspectors forward.

“Where to?” asked Jones.

“To the Tower. Tell them to stop opposite Jacobson’s Yard.”

Our craft was evidently a very fast one. We shot past the long lines of loaded barges as though they were stationary. Holmes smiled with satisfaction as we overhauled a river steamer and left her behind us.’

—The Sign of Four

My first experience of that giant of all rivers, the River Thames, was when I was taken to London by my father, who was then a police constable in the Metropolitan Police. And as we disembarked from Waterloo railway station and walked across to the other side of the Thames I was aware of a terrible smell. It was the year 1956 and I was only eight years old. “What’s that stink?” I asked my dad. “It’s the river, son,” said he, and then he proceeded to tell me a story about a time when he had only been a police constable for a few days, and he had seen a man jump into the waters. He told me that he knew very well not to dive in after him, because if he had done so, he too would have drowned or have died from some horrible

poison within the waters, for the river, he went on to explain, was poisonous to an extreme.

Since that early period in my life, the river has slowly become cleaner and less rapid, although its cleaning has been brought about over decades and of course the river is now largely clear, so clear that some people have also seen fish in the River Thames, and quite discernible to the naked eye.

My father told me about the river just that once and I never forgot his words, for when I saw it from the shoreline, I surely knew how poisonous it would have been if I had dared to jump in. And so, when I came to read the last few chapters of *The Sign of Four*, the ominous ugliness and murkiness of those dark and treacherous waters stayed with me. In the Sherlock Holmes story, the Thames represents all that is dark within the consciousness of the characters and their creator, Conan Doyle.

As I pick up my edition of *The Sign of Four*, with those lovely 1908 illustrations, I find myself quoting from Holmes and saying: “these are deep waters, Watson,” as if it is a reminder of the symbolic strength of the narrative which Conan Doyle uses in those last chapters from the book. In fact, it gives me the same slight shudder which I encountered when I first read about the great Grimpen Mire in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Those long narratives that Conan Doyle wrote, starting with *The Mystery of Cloombur*, an early piece – and not perfect by any means – were those narratives in which the author conveys a feeling of immense gloom and Gothic enchantment, feelings which seemed to dominate his thoughts. *The Sign of Four* is equally Gothic in its atmosphere, although it is a quality of the Gothic which is mixed with urban dereliction, and also carries within it echoes of impending doom, especially in the chapters that deal with the Sholtos, and their grisly fate. Conan Doyle had a taste for the bizarre and the macabre, which he no doubt drew from his reading of the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, master of all that is, or ever was bizarre. The only novel which comes close to that strange murky atmosphere is *The Hound*, which surely is the most accomplished of all cross-genre Gothic novels from the early 20th century.

The river kills or renounces any who, by accident or design, plunge into its waters, including Jonathan Small, who gets stuck by his wooden leg in the mud, down at Gravesend on the riverbank, and is unable to wrest himself from it. And of course, it is the last resting place also of the great Agra treasure, which had been obtained from its Indian guardians by force and murder, and therefore had a cursed history. Conan Doyle was big on curses. He thought and wrote a great deal about curses and his supreme example of the curse tale is, of course, *The Hound* itself.

As I delved further into the criminology and fascinating history of this period, I discovered much more about the River Thames and this fogbound, murky, and thoroughly weird narrative, which I think is surely one of the greatest of all Sherlock Holmes long stories.

Much older, at the age I think of 13 or 14, I recall reading Charles Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend*. As a symbol of all that is murky and impenetrable in the lives of the characters who inhabit its pages, the narrative begins with a description of two people; a father and his daughter, whose job is to scour the stinking waters of the Thames, in search of dead bodies which, if not yet rotten, could then be sold and used to contribute to the anatomical learning of students training to be doctors in the medical schools. The occupation of these river people was illegal, but nevertheless, yielded a great number of corpses. The possession of corpses by medics was not illegal.

Like descriptions of the overwhelming and suffocating pea souper, which forms one long extended metaphor, and lies like a blanket of death over the face of London in the opening chapter of Dickens's *Bleak House*, the River Thames of *Our Mutual Friend* presents the reader with a huge waterway, along whose surface, not only bloated bodies float, but where the river itself is like a silent foe or menacing entity, who offers the reader insoluble secrets and criminal intentions.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, the river searcher is the first person we encounter. And when a dead body is pulled out of the water, the clothes identify the wearer and everything appears to show it is the corpse of Mr. Harmon, one of the story's central characters, but others are persuaded to think that it may not be Harmon after all. Here, Dickens's account of the River Thames carries within it the dark and disturbing Gothic horror of Poe which so frequently imbues the work of Conan Doyle. Dickens knew how to set a scene as we see in the opening of *Our Mutual Friend*:

...A boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames as an autumn evening was closing in. The figures in this boat were those of a strong man with ragged, grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a dark girl of nineteen or twenty. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man, with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, kept an eager look-out. He had no net, hook or line, and he could not be a fisherman; and he could not be a waterman ... but his eyes watched every little race and eddy. She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But, in the intensity of her look, there was a touch of dread or horror. (1)

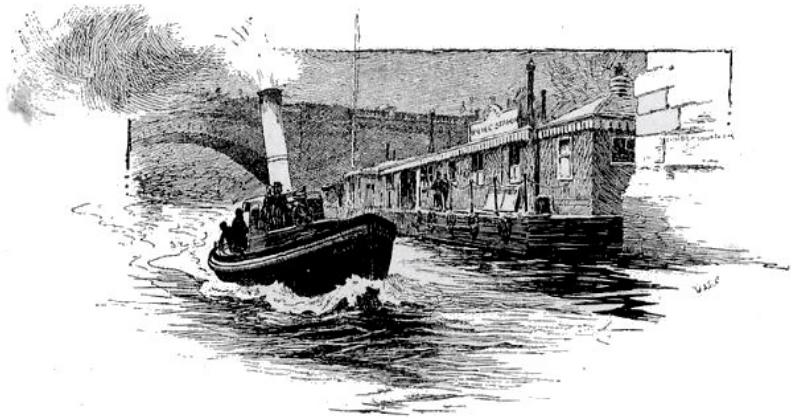
Those two words, dread and horror, are also words which coincide with the portrayal of the river in *The Sign of Four*, where the Thames is seen as a kind of corruption of the soul, dragging down all that is conscious, purposeful, and reasonable in the human spirit into its black waters, from which those human aspirations never return.

Conan Doyle's ability in writing realistic dialogue is masterful, but his ability also to convey symbolic tension and atmosphere in purely narrative form should equally be noted. In the conclusion of *The Sign of Four*, when Conan Doyle describes the final closing moments of the river pursuit, with Jonathan Small's strange, dwarf-like companion, screaming at his pursuers and shooting his poison-tipped arrows at Holmes and Watson from the stern of the boat, we gain an intimate understanding of the power of the darkness of the great river and how it both limits and helps to destroy some of the characters in the novel, even rendering the heroine's prospects both grim and penniless.

I have coursed many creatures in many countries during my checkered career, but never did sport give me such a wild thrill as this mad, flying man-hunt down the Thames ... Nearer we came and nearer. Jones yelled to them to stop. We were not more than four boat's lengths behind them, both boats flying at a tremendous pace. It was a clear reach of the river, with Barking Level upon one side and the melancholy Plumstead Marshes upon the other. At our hail the man in the stern sprang up from the deck and shook his two clinched fists at us, cursing the while in a high, cracked voice. ... the wooden-legged man threw himself upon the rudder and put it hard down, so that his boat made straight in for the southern bank, while we shot past her stern, only clearing her by a few feet. We were round after her in an instant, but she was already nearly at the bank. It was a wild and desolate place, where the moon glimmered upon a wide expanse of marsh-land, with pools of stagnant water and mud of decaying vegetation.

Conan Doyle's powerful imagery of the struggle between darkness and the light, between chaos and order, and between the exploitative white men and the culturally oppressed aboriginal, produces a disturbing vision of a dystopic city which squats like a great spider on the oppressed and crime-infected poor of London.

And the river of the Holmes story is equally disturbing where, elsewhere in *The Sign of Four*, the palpable and threatening atmosphere of the city itself is conveyed to us in this inspired account:



The Thames Police launch Alert, from an 1891 article in The Strand Magazine titled "A Night with the Thames Police."

It was a September evening, and not yet seven o'clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghost-like in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light — sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all humankind, they flitted from the gloom into the light, and so back into the gloom once more. I am not subject to impressions, but the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make me nervous and depressed.

The River Thames certainly had a powerful impact on the imagination of the Victorian reader, and there is no doubt that this presence of dark waters heightens the sense of danger and intrigue in this novel and other works.

In 1839, the *Metropolitan Police Act* was passed, and this then incorporated the Thames or River Police Division, although this section was not substantially new, since it had been going from 1798, when it was originally created to combat the rising crime levels of robberies, and pilfering of goods which lay in the Riverside quays, and in anchored ships.

This theft amounted to a sum of £500,000 annually. But so effective had the river police's jurisdiction become, that by 1899, Arthur Griffiths, a military historian and journalist, was able to report of them that:

The police has its headquarters in the world known floating station at Waterloo Bridge. This was formerly a Steamboat pier and it has a counter version at Erith. It also has the services of several steam launches, small, but for rapid transit up and down the river, for there is very little crime on the great waterway, thanks to the vigilance of the Thames police, who also do good work in preventing suicides. They have many opportunities of calling attention to possible foul play, by their recovery of bodies floating on the stream.

In past articles and book chapters I have conjectured that it is probable Jack the Ripper used the river, following his dastardly butcheries in Whitechapel. This is a highly likely scenario since the consuming darkness of the river was legendary. After dusk, an impenetrable gloom fell on its dark waters, thus enabling many criminals to escape without even a trace into various parts of the city. The river had its own populace, some of whom belonged to, or depended on the criminal classes. The 'mudlarks,' so called, consisted of boys and girls who varied in age from eight to 14. These were, in their appearance, much like the Baker Street Irregulars. Many of them were described in Holmes's time as 'coal light workers,' groups of mainly Irish youths, employed by older men, who were made to get coal from the ships illegally, which often their mothers would then take in the street and exchange for food. The children would get between the barges, lift up one end of the canvas and knock down pieces of coal. They frequently sold these coals in and among the lower classes of people for a few half pence each. When arrested by the Thames River Police, some of the mudlarks obtained short-term spells of imprisonment from three weeks to a month. But other, more repetitive offenders, were sent to Reformatories for two to three years.

In the middle of the 19th century, Henry Mayhew and other social commentators were able to comment on the great number of robberies committed on the River Thames. These declarations differed in value, for example, as Mayhew pointed out in his 1851 *London Labour and the London Poor*: "There are a great number of robberies of various descriptions committed on the Thames by different parties. These depredations differ in value, from the little ragged mudlark stealing a piece



East London Victorian mudlarks

of rope or a few handfuls of coals from a barge, to the lighterman carrying off bales of silk several hundred pounds in value.”

Looking to the long lines of shipping along each side of the river, these river criminals relied on the vessels that daily ploughed their way along its route. They were able to slip aboard the dense shipping in the docks and then emerge laden with untold wealth. And thus, we should not be surprised at the level of almost unseen crime which flourished along the river’s course.

Further up on the Thames from where Holmes and Watson entered the police steam launch could be seen at low tide groups of older women picking up coals in the bed of the river. Some of them, one account goes on to describe, starting her career with stealing rope or coal from barges, then proceeded to take the more valuable copper from vessels, and afterwards going down in the cabins and stealing other goods.

There was even a class of boys who sailed the river in very ancient boats, and often got on board larger craft under the pretext of sweeping. They would leave the barges laden with coffee, sugar or rice, stealing anything that they could get their hands on. They were again described as “ragged and wretched in appearance.” When pursued by the Thames River Police, they would take to the water like rats, splashing through the mud.

These youths were expert swimmers, and ranged from 12 to 16, attired – or rather, dis-attired – in a similar way to the other ragged boys in the metropolis, and in appearance, much like the Irregulars. Some of them were healthy, some slept in barges and others inhabited some of the local lodging houses. In the summertime, they would sleep in the open barges, and often, in the winter, cover themselves with old Hessian sacks to keep warm.

It is quite conceivable that the Baker Street Irregulars may have drawn some of their number from these gangs of children, often termed ‘river rats.’

Mayhew reports how, one morning, while running by the Tower of London, a policeman spotted a group of chimney sweeps who had stolen merchandise from a boat and were leaving in a steam vessel, carrying with them some large bags. On searching the bags, he found several packages of tobacco. The chimney sweeps were arrested and discovered to have in their possession £100 each. They were each sentenced to six months in prison, and having refused to pay their fines, were then imprisoned for an additional spell.

I have for long entertained the notion that the lightermen, who plied their craft and helped to convey people up and down the River Thames, may have had what was tantamount to a season ticket with Jack the Ripper, and if Conan Doyle’s convincing theory that the perpetrator of these crimes may have been an American, it would have been only too easy for a lighterman to convey him down river to Gravesend from where boats headed across the Atlantic and beyond, even to the shores of the United States.

The reputation of the lightermen who plied their trade in these river taxis during that period was not above reproach. Mayhew, for example, quotes an account of two men who, in April 1858, were charged with robbery from barges at Wapping. They received quantities of dye, wire, and other commodities near the London Docks. They then loaded the goods into an empty barge alongside two barges, took a chest of dye from one of them and a case of wire from the other, to the value of £25. Then they took the barge with the stolen property on board to Rotherhithe, landing at the Elephant Stairs, where they were taken away in a cart.

The property was never recovered. But the two men were sentenced to 18 months at the Criminal Central Court. Mayhew comments that many of the lightermen were often “dissipated in their habits, and then resorted to thieving when they lacked money.” And that they spent time dancing in the concert rooms on the notorious Ratcliffe Highway, a place also mentioned by Holmes. They were generally known to cohabit with

prostitutes, and they were “an entirely different class of men.” He compares them to the River pirates, who also lived with prostitutes, but who were smarter and better dressed.

In case anyone thinks that Mayhew’s descriptions are exaggerated, my own family history has shed light upon the matter of the reputation of the lightermen. When, at the end of the 19th century, my great uncle was found dead, his stiffening body stretched out on top of steps leading down into the river, in the region of Greenwich, it was discovered that he had been robbed of his takings as a newsagent. Because there were no witnesses to the crime, the perpetrator of this vicious murder was never discovered. Hence, the reputation that the River Thames had as a cloak of invisibility, under which crimes often could be committed, was a view which was shared by many Londoners of that time, including my grandfather Frederick Morrison.



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Whether you write with an old-fashioned pen like this fellow or the latest laptop, we are looking for you. All types of articles, toasts, thoughts, or reviews are welcome. It is up to you to make *Canadian Holmes* the stand-out journal it can be. Contact the Bootprint, Mark Alberstat, today with your ideas or articles.

markalberstat@gmail.com

Letter to the Editors

To the editors of *Canadian Holmes*:

Issue 47 number 2 contained an interesting investigation by Chris Redmond into the mysterious Owen T C Jones, a founding Bootmaker. I have some further information which was not available to Chris. For the 25th anniversary of the Bootmakers in 1997, Cameron Hollyer wrote a poem, *The Birth of the Bootmakers*, (see page 26) which he asked me to set to music. In verses 2 and 3 it lists the founding Bootmakers, at least according to Cameron's recollection:

There was Eric and Derrick and Hartley and True
And good Deacon Carleton and Gwendolyn too
David Skene Melvin and Mary MacMahon
And Katherine McCook were all in on the plan

Cameron of course was right there on the scene
And Ed Van der Flaes with his love ever Green
From the Baker Street Squires came Owen T Jones
Who collected ten shillings for coffee and scones

This gives us five people who were not in the list quoted from Ron DeWaal. Mary MacMahon was head of the literature section at the Toronto Reference Library and instrumental in the purchase of the lots which formed the nucleus of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection. Warren "Deacon" Carleton and Gwen Carleton were active in the society for many years; indeed, the award for best informal presentation is named after Warren Carleton in memory of his whimsical offerings (the first recipients were Barbara Rusch and Chris Redmond in 1989). He was also the Bootmakers' archivist for the first decade. Edwin Van der Flaes and Maureen Green were stalwart members for many years, each serving as Meyers. They travelled widely, representing the Bootmakers at Sherlockian events throughout North America. They were instrumental in encouraging young Sherlockians, myself included.

As for Owen T C Jones, Cameron provides little further insight, save the reference to the earlier society, The Baker Street Squires, and collecting the shillings fits with Hartley's recollection of Owen as the first treasurer. As for Cameron's egregious rhyming of scones with Jones, we can only say in his defence that Cameron was an American and could not be expected to know such things.

– Jim Ballinger

The Birth of the Bootmakers

By Cameron Hollyer (1997)

In the middle of February of '72
There gathered at Hart House a remarkable crew.
Their purpose it seems was to get some recruits
And found a society devoted to Boots.

There was Eric and Derrick and Hartley and True
And good Deacon Carleton and Gwendolyn too.
David Skene Melvin and Mary MacMahon
And Katherine McCook were all in on the plan.

Cameron of course was right there on the scene
And Ed Van der Flaes with his love ever Green.
From the Baker Street Squires came Owen T Jones
Who collected ten shillings for coffee and scones.

Three others were present though they could not be seen
(Whose memories the Bootmakers always keep green)
One was the person who matters the most
The affable author – that familiar old ghost –

Whose fables and fancies forever appeal
To the minds of his readers as if they were real –
And Sherlock and Watson whom his fancy made
To live through the ages and never to fade.

After discussion and a great deal of thought
With care and precision a Constitution was wrought
A motto was chosen “We will stick to our last”
And the Bootmakers have done so through all the years past.

That long-ago meeting accomplished its goals;
A thriving society of two hundred souls
Who follow the Master and see to his boots
And use their wits gladly in scholars' pursuits.

So here's to the Bootmakers' first twenty-five years
(We hope that its members are not in arrears).
Long may they flourish in the century to come
And keep green the memory of Holmes and his chum.

Sherlock Holmes and The Case of the Chairs

By Sonia Fetherston

Sonia Fetherston is Morley-Montgomery Award winning author and a frequent contributor to Sherlockian periodicals. She lives in the Northwest corner of the United States.

Editors's note: This article first appeared in the October 2012 edition of The Log.

When is a chair not a chair? When it abets mischief, of course. The more dastardly the guilty party, the more grisly the crime, the more unusual the circumstances, so much the better!

In the Sherlockian novels and short stories, chairs are so intertwined with wrongdoing they at times seem to be accessories to crime. A chair is the ideal accomplice. It can't be charged with a criminal act; neither can it be convicted. And while a chair may sometimes be called upon to "testify" against a human perpetrator, usually by telltale wear-and-tear, it takes a detective of Sherlock Holmes's rare abilities to put his finger on what's amiss. Real Holmeses though, are few and far between. Perhaps that's why bad guys are so eager to exploit chairs for their own purposes.

Before we examine some of the seating arrangements in the Canon, let's clarify what a chair is, or is supposed to be. Chairs are the most ancient types of furniture, being fairly indispensable in human homes and places of business since time out of mind. Their design today is nearly the same as it was 5,000 years ago; we know this from actual specimens found in burial sites like Egyptian pyramids.

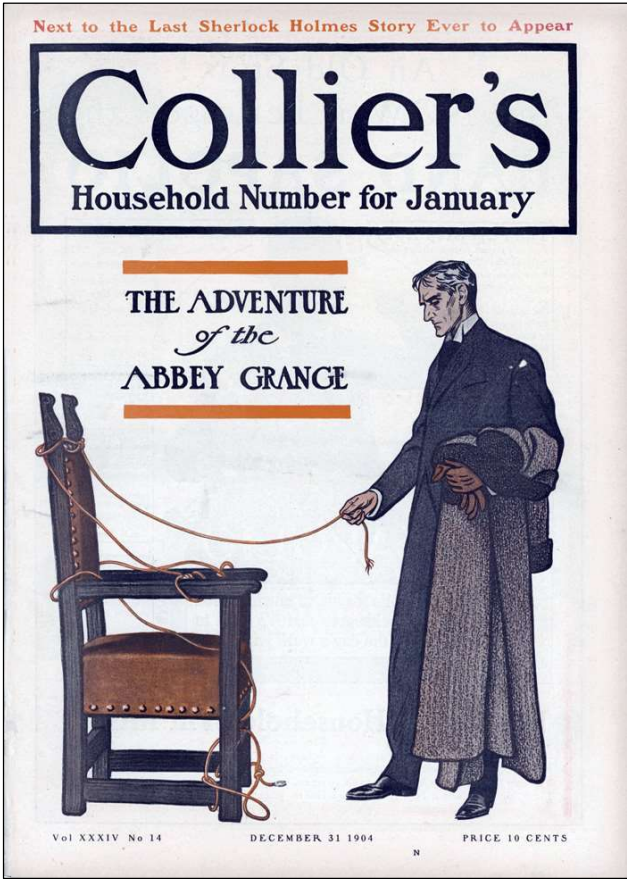
Interestingly, chairs share several crucial physical traits with human beings. Just like us, they have arms, legs, backs and seats. When we sit in them, we touch them intimately. They return that close familiarity, and they go us one better: nowadays chairs recline for our napping pleasure, massage and heat our aches away, and neatly stow our TV remote controls. Some models are even equipped to hold our favourite beverages; a few paragons now on the market will even chill the drinks for us. What more could a human possibly ask of a piece of furniture?

While Watson's writings fairly burst with furnishings of all sorts, shapes and sizes, the most fascinating is the catalogue of chairs he's left us.

Rocking chairs, basket chairs, library chairs, garden chairs, weighing chairs, armchairs, turning chairs, bath chairs and reclining chairs are just a few. We are even permitted to know what a few of the chairs are made from, including wood (generally) or oak (specifically), as well as wicker, cane, velvet, leather, and more. While most of them are innocent bystanders, an unusual number of the Canon's chairs are present for, or participate in, some fairly spectacular occurrences.

Take that dining room chair in "The Abbey Grange." This is the chair that Lady Brackenstall falsely implicates at the scene of the crime. The lady alleges her husband's killers tied her to this chair. "I was so firmly

bound that I could not move," she claims piteously, and the crimson cord woven through the open woodwork on the chair seems to bear out her story. It was at this point that her supposed captors killed her husband. Alas, she overlooks one niggling detail: her husband's gore happened to be present on the seat of the chair beneath her own shapely posterior! "If she were seated on the chair when the crime was done, how comes that mark?" Holmes reasonably wants to know. It's almost as if, having been used



Frederic Dorr Steele's illustration of Holmes examining the Brackenstall's chair on the December 31, 1904 cover of Collier's magazine,

in a lie, the chair then turns the tables (so to speak) and testifies against the real murderers. This chair at Abbey Grange has a counterpart of sorts at Stoke Moran, the troubled estate in the short story “The Speckled Band.” It is a “plain wooden chair against the wall” in Dr. Grimesby Roylott’s bed-room, and it’s this piece of furniture that would seemingly testify against its owner by story’s end. For this chair is



G. Dutriac’s illustration from Lectures Pour Tous, when that French magazine serialized “The Devil’s Foot,” or “Le Pied du Diable,” as it was translated, in 1921.

used in the commission of a deadly crime – threading a poisonous snake through a ventilator into stepdaughter Julia’s chamber. Now, her sister Helen is the intended victim. Holmes “squatting down in front of the wooden chair and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention,” then concludes, as he later tells his friend and colleague Dr Watson, that Roylott “had been in the habit of standing on it.” With poetic justice, and literary elegance, this same chair soon will hold the corpse of Dr Roylott. As Watson later records, “on the wooden chair, sat Dr. Grimesby Roylott....round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles....”.

Some chairs are like props in a diabolical theatre, and surely no drama is as fiendish as that in “The Devil’s Foot.” There, in a house called Tredannick Wartha, near the old stone cross upon the moor, siblings Brenda, George and Owen Tregennis gather round a table to play a game of whist. While so engaged they meet a horrible fate, the brothers left “gibbering like two great apes,” while their sister Brenda was slumped “across the arm of the chair” dead. Another chair in the room will be a receptacle for the local physician, who “fell into a chair in a sort of faint” after surveying the mayhem. During his investigation Holmes tries out each chair, including, presumably, Brenda’s death chair. Back at his rented cottage, pondering the tragedy, Holmes “sat coiled in his armchair.” When he and Watson experiment with the poison powder they sit in chairs to await the toxic effects. Later, a third brother, whom Holmes points to as the perpetrator, will die in a chair of his own.

Death chairs are, in fact, a recurring theme in the Canon, including the novel *The Sign of the Four*, in which Bartholomew Sholto is found dead in his chair, in a locked room, with a peculiar expression on his face. Something similar must have confronted the finder of another “dreadful” crime, that being the unchronicled tragedy of the Abernettys, which is fleetingly mentioned by Holmes in “The Six Napoleons.” Several generations of eminent Sherlockians have pondered this mystery from every angle. The most enlightened study appeared nearly three decades ago in *The Baker Street Journal*. Author William Hyder nimbly declared the venue of the Abernetty’s awful disaster to be the dining room of a hotel situated in a large city. It goes without saying that in a hotel dining room there are chairs helpfully grouped around tables.

Furthermore, Hyder proclaimed beyond any doubt that the “dreadful business” was “nothing less than murder – perhaps even multiple murder.”
(1)

Chairs don’t just cradle the dead in the Canon. People use chairs in quite creative ways to manipulate others, or to avoid being found out. In “The Copper Beeches,” the sole reason Violet Hunter is offered a job in the Rucastle household is so her employers can put her in a chair near a window. “A chair had been placed close to the central window, with its back turned toward it,” Violet tells Holmes and Watson. “In this I was asked to sit.” Two days later “this same performance was gone through under exactly similar circumstances.” Holmes divines that the Rucastles aim to trick their daughter’s suitor by causing Violet to unwittingly impersonate the girl. Another chair, this one in Holmes’s own sitting room, is used both to reveal and conceal. We know from “The Blanched Soldier” that Holmes likes to have his visitors sit so that “the light falls full upon

them,” the better to read them and gauge their trustworthiness. But in “The Second Stain” Lady Hilda Trelawney-Hope deliberately adjusts the proffered chair so that, under Holmes’s questioning, it will not become a hot seat.

If all the chairs in your own experience are peaceful places, you may be surprised to learn that the ones in the Canon are sometimes weaponized. In “The Second Stain,” for example, Lady Hilda witnesses Lucas go into battle against a knife-wielding woman, “a chair in his hand.” An argument can be made that this is for the purpose of defence. However, the couple is described as engaged in “a savage struggle,” its outcome “dreadful,” so we may presume that Lucas’s motivation was not entirely for his own protection.

In another instance of furniture-brandishing, Watson grabs a chair as if to swing it at the blackmailing title character in “Charles Augustus Milverton.” Only after Holmes shakes his head in warning does the good doctor replace the chair on the floor; Milverton himself responds to Watson’s retreat with “a bow, a smile, and a twinkle.”

There are other chairs in the Canon. The “malignant” Oldacre sat guarded by the police in his own parlour chair, in “The Norwood Builder.” Godfrey Staunton slumped in his chair “as if he had been pole-axed” in “The Missing Three Quarter.” In “The Dying Detective,” Culverton Smith hurls abuse at his butler from the depths of a fireside recliner. Holmes stands on a chair in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to give Watson a lesson in the fine art of facial characteristics.

Henry Baker’s hat is hung on the back of a chair in the sitting room at 221b in “The Blue Carbuncle.” Twice – once in “The Resident Patient” and again in “The Cardboard Box” – Watson leans back in his chair and falls into “a brown study.” And in “The Three Garridebs” Holmes utters the famous line “For God’s sake, say that you’re not hurt!” as he leads the bloodied Watson to a chair.

At the end of the day my personal favourite is my own chair, where I curl up to read the Canon again and again. Pull up your chair and join me.

References

(1) Hyder, William, “Parsley and Butter: The Abernethy Business,” *The Baker Street Journal*, September 1994, pp.152-160.

The Problem of the Bootmakers' Motto

By Don Roebuck

Don Roebuck teaches English in Toronto.

The Bootmakers' motto, which can be found in the lower left corner of the Master Bootmaker diploma, appears to be the Latin proverb "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam.*"

I say "appears," because what it actually says is "*crepitam,*" with a t and not a d. This could be some kind of play on words, or it could just be a mistake. Well, everyone makes mistakes (1)

This proverb has no verb, so it has to be mentally supplied with one, namely, "*iudicet*" ("let him judge"). Then the literal meaning is "Let the cobbler not judge more than a sandal" — which is to say, "Do not speak of things you do not know." (2)

The cobbler in this proverb, then, represents anyone with specialized knowledge, and he could just as easily have been a practitioner of any other trade or profession. But he is a cobbler, and the reason (according to Pliny the Elder) is that it was to a cobbler that this remark was originally addressed. The 4th-century B.C.E. Greek painter Apelles had a gallery where he exhibited his work, and one day a cobbler came in, looked at a full-length

portrait that was hanging there, and said that one of the man's sandals was missing a loop for the attachment of the strap. When he left, Apelles repainted the sandal, making the correction. The next day, the cobbler



Ne sutor ultra crepitam

returned, looked at the same portrait again, and criticized one of the man's legs, and Apelles said, presumably in Greek, "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam.*" (3)

One can understand why The Bootmakers of Toronto would have adopted this proverb as their motto. How many proverbs are there that are — more or less — about bootmakers? (And that are, to boot, in a dead language?) But now we have a problem: this motto appears to be addressed to The Bootmakers' own members, but is it an appropriate thing to say to Sherlockians? If we could only speak of things we knew, how could we say anything about Sherlock Holmes?

The Solution

There are two possible solutions to this puzzle. One is that the proverb really means something else, and the other is that it is really addressed to someone else. And I would further submit, that these days, our understanding of a Latin proverb is likely to be coloured by how it is translated into our own language.

Now, bilingual dictionaries typically translate a proverb in one language into an equivalent proverb — one that makes the same basic point — in the other language. And sometimes this equivalent proverb is one that arose independently in the second language, out of the same universal human experience. Take the Japanese proverb "*Saru mo ki kara ochiru.*" literally, "Even a monkey falls out of a tree" — which is to say, "Everyone makes mistakes." The Kenkyusha Japanese-English dictionary translates this with the English proverb "Homer sometimes nods," which makes exactly the same point, even though the imagery is completely different. (4)

But with our Latin proverb about the cobbler, things are not so simple. There is a standard English translation, namely, the English proverb "Let the cobbler stick to his last." (5) Now, since we have a cobbler in both proverbs, the English proverb must — surely! — have been derived, at least in part, from the Latin one. We have a last (a shoemaker's form) in the English proverb, instead of a sandal, but that does not seem to me to be important. But one very important difference is that the English proverb comes complete with a verb ("stick"), and this verb says nothing specifically about judging, or speaking, so that this concept has, in effect, been lost in translation. The result, then, is that unless you are familiar with the Latin proverb, or with the story about Apelles, you may get the impression that what is at issue in the English proverb is not what the cobbler says, but what he does, especially in his work.

But this is all speculation, and to learn what the English proverb really means, we have to see how it is actually used. Now, purely by luck, I have run across this proverb twice since receiving my M.Bt. The first time was in an English translation of a discussion of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, by the Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich. Peer Gynt is a Norwegian peasant lad who leaves his home in search of fame and fortune, but he is unprepared for life in the outside world, and he has one misadventure after another. "He wants to conquer the world," says Reich, "but it refuses to be conquered. It has to be overpowered. ... To overpower it, one needs knowledge, a great deal of thorough, cogent knowledge. But Peer Gynt is a dreamer. ... Peer Gynt will get his neck broken with his folly. People will see to it that he gets his neck broken. It will be drummed into his ears time and again! The cobbler must stick to his last!" (6)

And at the end of the play Peer Gynt returns, weary and disillusioned, to the hut in the woods, and to the woman who has always loved him, as if that is where he should have been all along. So the proverb here has nothing to do with anything he has said, but seems to be referring to his choice of career.

My second encounter with this proverb was in a short feature commemorating the birth of the author A.A. Milne, which appeared in *The Globe and Mail*. (7) Milne wrote plays, novels, essays, poetry, short stories, and biography, but all of this was overshadowed by his children's books, especially *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and he resented this. "I wanted to escape from them," he wrote in his autobiography, *It's Too Late Now*. "In vain. England expects the writer, like the cobbler, to stick to his last."

And this solves the problem of The Bootmakers' motto. This motto — or, at least, its English equivalent — has come to refer not to what someone has said, or might say, but to his or her work. And it is not directed at The Bootmakers' own members, which would make no sense, but at another author who resented having one, less serious, part of his literary output overshadow all the rest. "Dear Mr. Conan Doyle, wherever you are," it seems to be saying, "We know how you feel about Sherlock Holmes. But we hope that, when we meet again, you will have some fresh adventures of his waiting for us."

Notes

- (1) "*Crepitam*" could be a combination of "*crepida*" ("sandal") and "*crepitus*" ("rattling, creaking, rustling, clattering") — but why?
- (2) This proverb is also found with "*supra*" ("above") instead of "*ultra*" ("beyond"), but with no difference in the basic meaning.
- (3) Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 35.84-85.

- (4) *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*, 4th ed, Tokyo, 1974, s.v. *saru*.
- (5) This is the translation in Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, 1st ed., Oxford, Clarendon, 1879, and *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, 5th ed. (London, 1968), s.v. *crepida* and *sutor* in both.
- (6) Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, trans. Vincent R. Carfagno, London, Souvenir, 1983, pp. 44-45
- (7) *The Globe and Mail*, 18 Jan. 2023, p.A2



Diary notes continued from page 15

slum clearance. Some letters in the newspapers persuaded them to have a Sherlock Holmes Exhibit. A reproduction of Holmes and Watson's sitting room at The Abbey House, which occupied 221 Baker Street, was opened on 22 May 1951. Sir Arthur's children, Denis, Jean and Mary attended the opening. Adrian and his wife, Anna, visited the display later.

Five people who worked on the display started the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. Winifred Paget, the daughter of Sidney Paget, the noted illustrator of the original stories in *The Strand Magazine*, attended the first meeting and was a long-term member.

After the Festival, the room was disassembled and stored. The Whitbread Brewing Company bought the room and reopened the Northumberland Arms Hotel as the Sherlock Holmes Hotel.

In 1992, Jean Upton visited the room and saw that it was not in good shape. She and Roger have been the caretakers of the room ever since. In 1995, actor David Burke, the first actor to play Dr. Watson in the Granada series was filmed at a dinner in the room for a television special.

After his presentation Roger answered some questions.

Karen Campbell, presented "The Three Gables" Quiz.

The winner was Pratap Reddy. He will receive a prize from George Vanderburgh.

Karen Gold presented her song on "The Three Gables," "Isadora Klein" sung to the tune of Elvis Presley's *Money Honey*.

Philip Elliott gave the wrap-up of the story.

The next Zoom Meeting will be on September 7. The story will be "The Three Garridebs."

– Bruce D. Aikin, M.Bt., Sh.D

Conan Doyle's other work for The Strand Magazine - The Story of the Brazilian Cat (December 1898)

By Mark Jones

Mark Jones is a Sherlockian and Doylean based in York, in the United Kingdom. He writes widely on all matters ACD and is co-host of Doings of Doyle – The Arthur Conan Doyle Podcast.

Marshall King, a dissolute young man with expensive tastes, has found no financial benefit from being related to the miserly Lord Southerton. In this he has something in common with his cousin, Everard King, but there the similarity ends: unlike Marshall, King has gumption and, having made his fortune in Brazil, now lives on a beautiful English country estate, surrounded by his living collection of exotic animals. When Marshall is invited to his cousin's house for the weekend, he has high hopes of tapping his rich relative for cash, but Everard's wife is distinctly cold, and his host seems less interested in his guest than his prized Brazilian cat...

As in so many of the *Round the Fire Stories*, Conan Doyle opens with the gothic trope of the visit to the isolated mansion, but here it is used to wrong foot rather than create foreboding. Greylands is a far cry from the decaying towers of Roylott's Stoke Moran (although it shares its collection of exotic creatures). Instead, the beautiful house and its welcoming owner are a lure – for Marshall and the reader – as the true danger lurks inside both. Conan Doyle further sidetracks the audience by introducing Everard's frosty Brazilian wife whose expressive dark eyes and cold manner seek to compel Marshall back to London. One might be forgiven for thinking the title of the story applies to her, until we discover the existence of a genuine Brazilian cat, an eleven-foot-long black puma or similar, caged in the mansion.

It will not take *Canadian Holmes* readers long to realize that “The Brazilian Cat” is a dress rehearsal for a far more well known and better regarded story. Mrs. King is a prototype Beryl Stapleton, hoping to warn Marshall and yet held back out of fear of her husband, while the Brazilian cat is... a damned big cat. Conan Doyle improves on the premise in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by adding the love interest with Sir Henry, which gives weight to Beryl's motivations, while the literal cat is replaced

by the spectral Hound. One wonders if *Strand* readers spotted the connection at the time, the stories being less than four years apart.

Like *The Hound*, “The Brazilian Cat” is a masterly demonstration of Conan Doyle’s capacity for suspense. Having established the creature, its dislike of strangers and its means of confinement in the first half of the story, Everard’s betrayal and Marshall’s peril in the second half come as absolutely no surprise. But it is the intense, agonizing, drawn out description of the nightmare evening in the cage that singles out the story for special attention. One lives every second of Marshall’s terror with wet palms, especially when man and animal come face to face, the cat’s eyes glimmering ‘like two discs of phosphorous in the darkness’ in another foreshadowing of the *Hound*. Little wonder then that “The Brazilian Cat” was recently used as the source material for an ‘empirical measurement of suspense’ undertaken by academics for the *Scientific Study of Literature*. (1)

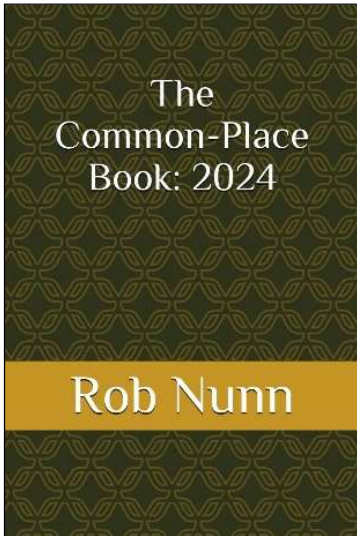
Another interesting feature of the story is that it tells two mysteries in one. On recovering from his ordeal, Marshall discovers he is the new Lord Southerton as his uncle died on the same night he was locked up with the creature. Although there are clues in the flurry of telegrams and the shadowy behaviour of Southerton’s valet, Everard’s plan is not spelled out, at least not as it might be beside the homely fire of Baker Street. Conan Doyle respects the audience’s intelligence enough to leave out the details, while Everard’s intent is perfectly clear. The one downside of the ending is that our degenerate narrator comes out of his ordeal pretty well. We can only hope that the experience encouraged him to reconsider his life choices...

As an aside, the term ‘Brazilian cat’ was a German zoological phrase, now defunct, which was used interchangeably for large pumas or jaguars. One particularly fine specimen of a ‘Brazilian cat’ was encountered in South America by British explorer Percy Fawcett in 1906. Fawcett knew Conan Doyle and his field reports from the Amazon were later used by the author when he put pen to paper on *The Lost World*.

References

(1) Bentz, Espinoza, Simeonova, Köppe, One, “Measuring Suspense in Real Time: A New Experimental Methodology,” *Scientific Study of Literature*, April 2024, <https://ssol-journal.com/articles/10.61645/ssol.182> (retrieved June 2024).

“Holmes gave me a brief review”



The Common-Place Book: 2024 by Rob Nunn (available on Amazon, 2024, \$6.75 CAD, paperback).

This slim volume is the second collection of Sherlockian writing by Rob Nunn, ASH, BSI, and Gasogene of the Parallel Case of St. Louis. The 13 lucky entries are a mix of scholarly articles, blog posts, papers to scion societies and online presentations. Each piece has a brief introduction, with photos and Canon illustrations sprinkled throughout this compendium.

You may rediscover some familiar material, including a 2023 article that appeared in this journal on the hype surrounding Irene Adler. Other pieces

will be new and fun to discover if you haven't kept up with all Rob's writing. For instance, there's a glimpse at a scion society in Hell and lessons on how to nurture new fans of the great detective.

Nunn finds inspiration in various corners of the Canon and his everyday life as an educator. If you're looking to get your own creative juices flowing, Nunn's musings may help get you started. Readers will certainly discover how much fun it is to take nuggets of Sherlockiana and turn them into gold.

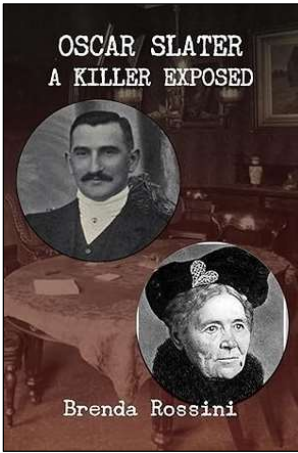
– JoAnn Alberstat

Oscar Slater: A Killer Exposed by Brenda Rossini (MX, 2023, \$20.28 CDN paperback on Amazon; \$47.79 CDN hardcover from MX)

Rossini, an American Sherlockian, takes a different view of the Oscar Slater case than other authors who have studied it, including Arthur Conan Doyle. She has no doubt that Slater brutally murdered wealthy senior Marion Gilchrist in her Glasgow, Scotland, flat on Dec. 21, 1908.

In laying out this theory, Rossini fingers two others as being co-conspirators in planning the jewelry heist gone awry. Her book examines their backgrounds, motivations, and actions before and after the killing, along with those of Slater.

Early chapters are a mix of arguments to support this theory and vignettes on topics such as the British Empire, Jewish refugees and anti-



Semitism, and Scottish literature.

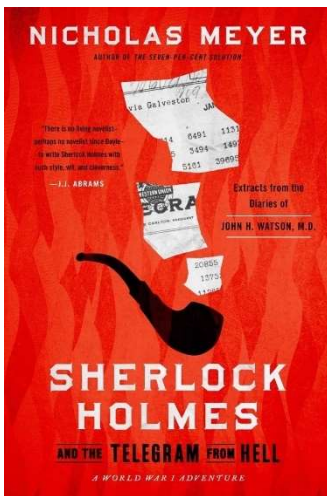
Rossini name drops some well-known authors and their books on the subject, refuting various aspects of their theories that Slater was wrongfully convicted. Readers of this work who are familiar with the Slater case will have an easier time following along early in the book than those who are newer to the topic.

The book does find more solid ground, and becomes more cohesive, when the author turns to a chronological approach to analyzing the events leading up to the murder, and its aftermath. The detail about, and description of, the planning involved is especially suspenseful

and sinister.

Rossini agrees with other writers on one thing: the police investigation was shoddy and the trial hurried. Just how sound are her theories about the murder itself? You get to be the judge and jury in this case.

– JoAnn Alberstat



Sherlock Holmes and the Telegram from Hell by Nicholas Meyer (2024, Mysterious Press \$26.95 USD/\$36.95 CAD, hardcover)

As with his last two books, and even his seminal *7% Solution*, Meyer once again takes Holmes and Watson on a globetrotting adventure far from the familiar comforts of Baker Street. This time, under direct orders from ‘M’ and the British Secret Service, our heroes travel to the USA and Mexico City in an attempt to uncover and stop a fiendish plot that would unleash German U-boats and prevent the Americans from entering WWI, with the key to it all being the titular ‘Telegram from Hell.’ Along the way they

are hindered and helped by a host of historical figures, including Roger Casement, Alice Roosevelt, and even exchange gunfire with a band of Pancho Villa’s men. While it’s as unlikely a plot as ever involved Holmes, Meyer’s impeccable handling and characterization of Holmes and Watson lets you take it all in stride and enjoy the ride. Recommended.

– Charles Prepolec

B OOTMAKERS' DIARY



... it is a page from some private diary.

— *The Five Orange Pips*

Saturday, April 13, 2024 – *Story Meeting: The Three Gables*

On Saturday, April 13, Mike Ranieri, as Meyers, welcomed 54 attendees to consider the curious case of “The Three Gables.”

Mike noted that a possible group trip to see the Shaw Festival’s play, *Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of the Human Heart*, has proven to have logistical problems and he encouraged people to see it on their own.

Mike asked Doug Wrigglesworth to introduce our first speaker, Bootmaker John Gehan. The title of John’s presentation was “The Bio of Basil Rathbone.”

Philip St. John Basil Rathbone was born on 13 June 1892, in Johannesburg, South African Republic, to British parents. His mother, Anna Barbara, was a violinist, and his father, Edgar Philip Rathbone, was a mining engineer.

John described how the Rathbones fled to Britain when Basil was three years old after his father was accused by the Boers of being a spy following the Jameson Raid. Rathbone attended Repton School in Derbyshire from 1906 to 1910, where he excelled at sports and was given the nickname “Ratters” by schoolmates. He was involved in theatrics at school.

After a brief stint as an insurance agent, he joined his cousin Frank Benson’s theatrical company. There he learned to act and fence.

He was in the First World War as a private and was a two-time fencing champion. His brother was killed in action. His mother died while he was in France.

In 1921, he made his first film. Another member of the cast was Nigel Bruce. A later film, *The Captive*, also had Arthur Wontner in the cast. Wontner would later play Sherlock Holmes in five British films.

Rathbone’s excellent speaking voice allowed him to transition to talking movies.

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