



### Special points of interest:

- Was Holmes hoodwinked in *The Abbey Grange*?
- Sherlock Holmes, master blackmailer?
- Is that the 'long suffering landlady' in *His Last Bow*?
- Questions about a dying detective
- Oberstein was certainly a considerate spy

Volume 1, Issue 1

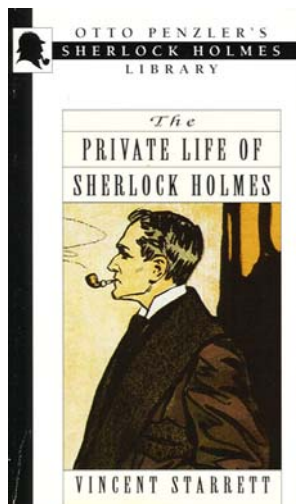
Spring, 2007

## Starrett's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*

As I launch a newsletter dedicated to Sherlockian commentary, I feel compelled to mention what, for me, is the flag bearer in the field, its standard proudly planted in the forefront of writings about the Sacred Writings.

I think that Marvin Kaye's *The Game is Afoot* was the first book I purchased that contained essays about Holmes. But it was Otto Penzler's Sherlock Holmes Reference Library series that really turned on the light bulb for me. I still nurture a faint hope that Mr. Penzler will some day add more volumes.

For me, Vincent Starrett's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* stands out as the best of the bunch. I leaf through it time and time again.



*The Evolution of a Profile* is a wonderful essay that was the standard on the subject until Walter Klinefelter's *Sherlock Holmes in Portrait and Profile*.

Speaking of Frederic Dorr Steele, Starrett opines, "Sixty

tales, in all, comprise the saga of Sherlock Holmes, and Dorr Steele has illustrated twenty-nine. While he yet lives and loves and lifts his pencil, will he not do the other thirty-one?"

Starrett writes intelligently, eloquently and amicably, but never condescendingly. Scholarly Sherlockiana can often be unapproachable. Starrett bridges the gap between writer and reader more smoothly than the "so many who have written so much for so few."

This is the second-longest book in the SH Reference Library (trailing only the Starrett-edited 221B: *Studies in Sherlock*) but there is no sense that it is padded with filler. It is the real deal, from start to finish.

## From the Roll Top Keyboard

In our computer age, the image of a writer sitting at an old roll top desk and scribbling away furiously as the muse speaks seems like a quaint anachronism. However, that spirit still appeals to many, thus the title of what would normally be a 'From The Editor' column.

*Baker Street Essays* is a newsletter containing Sherlockian

commentary and speculation by me (Bob Byrne). Most entries will address Arthur Conan Doyle's original stories, with occasional articles on non-Canonical Holmes-related elements.

While non-Canonical views will be expressed, they are not intended to offend and should be viewed as explorations in Sherlock Holmes.

### The Cases

The Abbey Grange	2
Charles Augustus Milverton	4
His Last Bow	7
Black Peter	8
The Dying Detective	9
The Bruce Partington Plans	9
The Second Stain	10
Wisteria Lodge	12

## Some Thoughts Regarding *The Abbey Grange* (ABBE)

### The Fifth Time?

In *The Five Orange Pips*, Holmes says "I have been beaten four times - three times by men, and once by a woman." Might not *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange* provide us the opportunity to add one to that count?

The facts as Holmes accepts them in this case: Sir Eustace Brackenstall is presented as an abusive husband when drinking. Lady Brackenstall (real name, Mary Fraser) had met First

Officer Jack Croker on a voyage from her native Australia to England. He fell in love with her but received only friendship for her part. Mary then met Sir Eustace, was courted and married the wealthy baronet. Croker later learned from Mary's maid, Theresa Wright, that Eustace treated his love poorly.

Croker familiarized himself with the household and knocked on the study French door one cold night. Mary let him in. Sir Eustace entered the room in a rage, insulting his wife and striking her in the face with a stick. He turned on Croker, who defended himself with a fireplace poker and killed Brackenstall. Croker, Mary and Theresa conspired to make the affair look like a burglary, which fooled the police, but not Holmes.

Later, Holmes gives Croker a chance to flee ahead of the police, but the man refuses to abandon his love. This had been a test by Holmes, which Croker passed. Holmes provides no more assistance to Stanley Hopkins and leaves Croker to do his

best to remain a free man and attempt to build a future with Fraser.

Was Holmes duped? Could not the "facts" be looked at with

different motives, leading to an alternate conclusion? What reader, familiar with today's television dramas (or even the Columbo episodes of the nineteen seventies), can't envision a different story?

Suppose that Mary and Croker had an affair on the ship? Casual sex was certainly frowned upon in Victorian England, but neither was married or engaged, so there was no scandalous adultery. However, they continued with the affair, even as Mary pledged her affections to Sir Eustace Brackenstall. How many romantic assignations did they have? Did Mary's attitude towards her husband turn colder? Like Jim Browner in *The Cardboard Box*, did Sir Eustace increase his drinking, the state of his marriage further deteriorating?

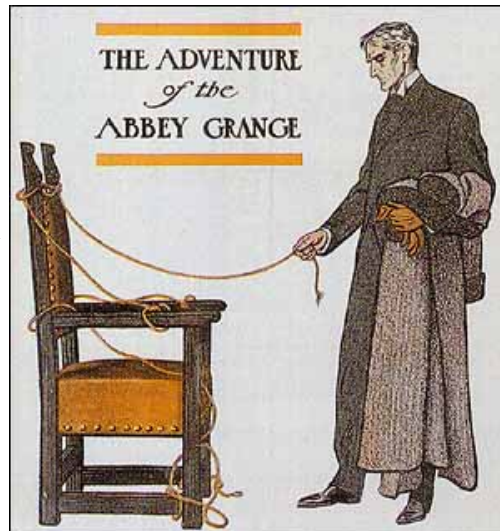
Then, Sir Eustace saw the unmistakable signs of infidelity. Cheating women could certainly be indiscreet. Charles Augustus Milverton made his living off them. Finally, Sir Eustace, suspecting that the man who was cuckolding his wife was in his very house, rushed into the study to confront the lovers.

Naturally, he first turned his attention towards his wife, the very woman he provided for and in return was betrayed by. This gave Croker the opportunity to grab the fireplace poker and strike down Sir Eustace. The two lovers were stunned at what they had done and turned to the nearby wine to steady their nerves. Theresa Wright entered the room and ever loyal to her mistress, threw in her lot with the pair.

Events then transpired as Holmes believed. That is one scenario. There is a similar but more cunning version of events as well.

Croker and Mary are lovers, as postulated above. The affair continued even after she married Sir Eustace. However, they feel constricted by the need for secrecy and resent their time apart. Mary, now Lady Brackenstall, is likely the principal heir to the significant Brackenstall fortune. Only Sir Eustace's annoying habit of being alive stands in the way of their being together and also of being very rich. The divorce laws of the day are no help.

If they can kill Sir Eustace and make it appear that it was an accident, or completely shift the blame away from Mary, their happiness would be assured



**"Only Sir Eustace's annoying habit of being alive stands in the way of their being together and also of being very rich."**

## Some Thoughts Regarding The Abbey Grange (ABBE) cont.

(keep in mind, nobody except Theresa Wright knows about Croker at this point). Croker is presently residing in Sidenham and learns of a gang that recently committed a robbery there. The gang makes a perfect scapegoat. One evening, Mary secretly lets Croker into the house. She calls out to her husband, who enters the room. Croker smashes him in the head, killing Sir Eustace. Again, from this point on, events proceed as Holmes believes they did, Theresa planting the dead man's cudgel on him the only notable variation. Holmes even tells Croker that he should wait a year and then pursue Mary Fraser's affections. He falls right into their plan!

In both of these scenarios, Sir Eustace can either be a black-guard or an adequate husband (Hopkins' description of the man seems to preclude him being of stellar character): it matters not. The lovers want him dead so that they can be together and his fitness as a husband is irrelevant.

These scenarios are plausible and only conflict with the story as presented in that they assume Croker, Mary and Theresa lied. Well, Holmes assumed that himself, so that isn't such a stretch.

Fact: Lady Brackenstall secretly let a man into her home late at night;

Fact: That man was in love with her;

Fact: That man was willing to sacrifice his own life for her;

Fact: Lady Brackenstall was unhappy with her marriage (by her own admission);

Fact: Lady Brackenstall knew that the law offered her no escape or redress.

Supposition: It is more likely that she let the man in as part of a plot against her husband than it is for Sir Eustace to have somehow discovered their presence and gotten himself killed while confronting them.

Watson waxed eloquently about the former Mary Fraser:

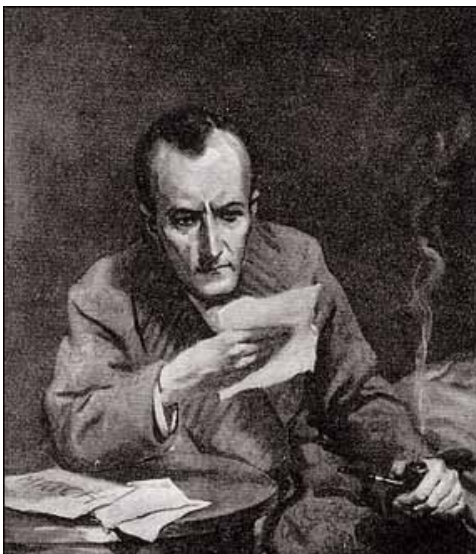
*Lady Brackenstall was no ordinary person. Seldom have I seen so graceful a figure, so womanly a presence and so beautiful a face.*

Holmes and Watson decreed themselves a two man judge and jury and found Croker not guilty. Were they fooled by a woman with a beautiful face and likely at least a modicum of cunning?

*Nolo contendere.*



JOHN WAS ORDERED TO ADMIT AS FIRE A SPECIMEN  
OF HARRISON AS BYES FARMED THROUGH 19



To the left is an illustration by Joseph Simpson for the first appearance of *The Red Circle* in *The Strand*.

To the right is a picture of Arthur Wontner, star of five Sherlock Holmes films in the nineteen thirties.

Wontner's chin was not quite so squared as the one drawn by Simpson, but the similarities are striking, especially when considering that Simpson's drawing appeared over twenty years before Wontner made his first Holmes film, *The Sleeping Cardinal* (retitled *The Fatal Hour* in the United States).



## Some Thoughts Regarding Charles Augustus Milverton (CHAS)

### **Don't Mess With the Man**

It should come as no surprise that those ne'er do wells who choose to confront Holmes in his Baker Street lodgings suffer very unpleasant consequences. Charles Augustus Milverton is just one villain who pays a steep price for his cheekiness.

Milverton visits Baker Street in an attempt to conduct some business (albeit, illegal and unsavory business). Holmes and Watson attempt to wrest a notebook from him by force. Milverton pulls out a gun and brandishes it at the two men, making it very clear that he will shoot them. Since Watson is holding a chair with which he would gladly bash Milverton, the visitor is ready to meet force with greater force. When Milverton smugly walks out the door of Baker Street, he is a marked man. He is soon dead, Holmes and Watson secretly watching a woman gun him down in his own study. Holmes made no move to prevent Milverton's death. For all we know, Holmes himself brought a gun on his burglary outing and was going to kill Milverton himself. This would explain his not wanting Watson to come along (this is explored in the next section). Threaten to shoot Holmes in his own sitting room and you end up dead very soon thereafter.

In *The Speckled Band*, Grimesby Roylott confronts Holmes in a memorable Baker Street scene. When he storms out, he has already signed his own death warrant. Holmes whips a deadly snake back towards Roylott. The villain is dead, his own daughter conspires with Holmes to cover it up and the incident is dis-

missed as a tragic accident.

In *The Final Problem*, the infamous Professor Moriarty comes to Baker Street (later setting it on fire!) and tells Holmes that if the detective does not leave him alone, Moriarty will destroy him. Holmes even admits to feeling fear when the Professor confronts him. How does Holmes solve the problem? He baits Moriarty away from London, ensuring that the Professor will escape the police net. Then he throws Moriarty off a ledge and to the base of a waterfall. Talk about taking matters into your own hands!

It can be a very dangerous move for a villain to stop by Baker Street to threaten Sherlock Holmes in person. But Baron Gruner learns in *The Illustrious Client* that even home is not safe from Holmes. Gruner intimates that Holmes could suffer a fate similar to that of the French



agent Le Brun, who was beaten and crippled by French criminals. By now we know that Gruner is trouble. Holmes is present when a former lover of

Gruner's exacts her revenge by throwing acid in his face.

Coincidence? Possibly, but I distrust coincidence.

### **The Master Blackmailer: Milverton or Holmes?**

Holmes tells Watson that Milverton is the worst man in London. For someone who seemingly knew about every type of depravity and ruffian in the city, that is quite a statement. Me think he doth protest too much. Was Holmes really so disgusted by blackmail? Or was it Milverton himself that displeased him?

Holmes informs Watson that he intends to burgle Milverton's house to obtain the documents so compromising to Lady Eva Brackwell. Watson assumes that he will assist, but Holmes tells him "You are not coming." Watson objects and Holmes responds with "You can't help me." Watson continues to insist and Holmes, who had "looked annoyed," gives in and claps Watson on the shoulder, looking to make the best of a bad situation. But why is it a bad situation?

Holmes has already infiltrated the Milverton household by seducing Agatha, a maid. He must have been quite charming, since she became engaged to him after only a few meetings. Having secured the knowledge he needed, Holmes was ready to move forward. He intended to sneak into Milverton's house, kill him, steal all of the incriminating documents in the office, and then engage in a second profession. Holmes would use



## Some Thoughts Regarding Charles Augustus Milverton (CHAS) cont.

the documents to secretly blackmail the victims, nicely supplementing his income as a consulting detective.

Watson can only report Holmes' motives as they appear to him. Were Holmes not shackled with Watson's company, a different story might evolve, such as the following:

In addition to his first class, up-to-date burgling kit, Holmes brings a gun. Perhaps the nickel-plated jimmy is accompanied by a nickel-plated revolver.

Holmes knows that the 'beast of a dog' Milverton keeps is locked up by Agatha, who is expecting Holmes (code name, Escott) for a late-night assignment. Sans Watson, he gains access to the house in the same manner recounted in the story (removing a pain of glass and reaching inside to open the greenhouse door). He silently crosses to a door, passes through it into another room and enters a short passage. He listens carefully at the door, enters and here, events can follow one of two paths: either Milverton is in the room, or it is empty. If Holmes heard more than one voice in the room, he would wait until only Milverton remained or the room emptied.

If Milverton is in the room, Holmes brandishes the gun and then knocks him unconscious. He opens the safe and takes all of the documents he can carry, secreting them about his person and/or putting them in a pouch he brought for that purpose. All that remains is to kill Milverton, making it appear as if his death was a burglary attempt gone

awry, or an affair de cour with tragic consequences.

If the room is empty, Holmes opens the safe and takes the documents as described above. He then makes a noise that draws Milverton into the room. He shoots him and stages the scene as above.

Milverton is dead and no one knows that Holmes now has all of the incriminating materials. He can stretch his blackmailing efforts out across years. With his fine reputation in the community and his seemingly limitless contacts from the seedier side of London, he is perfectly situated to ensure that his own role remains unknown in his lucrative side business. If any Sherlockian can establish a plausible case that the Milverton affair occurred before the Great Hiatus (1899 seems to be the most common belief), perhaps the real enmity between Holmes and Moriarty sprang from the former running a criminal enterprise that should have rightfully belonged to the latter.

### Keep an Eye on Watson

Sherlockians have noted something Watson recorded Holmes as saying in this case. Just before showing Watson his burgling kit, Holmes says, "You know, Watson, I don't mind confessing to you that I have always had an idea that I would have made a highly efficient criminal. This is the chance of a lifetime in that direction!"

But what about Watson? Shortly after that statement, the doctor tells Holmes that he has rubber-soled tennis shoes and that he can make a pair of masks out of

black silk. Holmes replies that Watson has a "strong natural



turn" for this type of criminal preparation. Hmmm...

Once they have gained access to Milverton's study, Holmes sets Watson to guard the door. He is now the 'lookout.' Caught up in the excitement of their acts, Watson writes, "My first feeling of fear had passed away, and I thrilled now with a keener zest than I had ever enjoyed when we were the defenders of the law instead of its defilers." He mentions the sporting interest of the adventure and adds "Far from feeling guilty, I rejoiced and exulted in our dangers. With a glow of admiration I watched Holmes unrolling his case of instruments and choosing his tool..."

This sounds like someone who is thoroughly enjoying breaking the law. Having experienced the exhilaration of his naughty act, could Watson simply go cold turkey? Or, knowing that the spark of illicit behavior still smoldered in his breast, can we look at other events throughout

**"..perhaps the real enmity between Holmes and Moriarty sprang from the former running a criminal enterprise that should have rightfully belonged to the latter."**

## Some Thoughts Regarding Charles Augustus Milverton (CHAS) cont.

the Canon and see perhaps just the faintest possibility that the spark was fanned into a flame and prompted Watson to action?

### **The Engagement**

Much has been written by many regarding Holmes' cavalier treatment of the maid, Agatha, in becoming engaged to her during his investigation. The Granada adaptation conveyed, in an understated manner, the devastating impact the deception had on her.

However, I call to your attention Watson's curious response to the surprising news of Holmes' engagement. 'But,' you say, 'Watson wasn't surprised by Holmes' engagement.'

That is the curious response. The exchange reads:

*Holmes:* You would not call me a marrying man, Watson?

*Watson:* No, indeed!

*Holmes:* You'll be interested to hear that I'm engaged.

*Watson:* My dear fellow! I congratulate-

*Holmes:* To Milverton's housemaid.

*Watson:* Good heavens, Holmes!

*Holmes:* I wanted information, Watson.

*Watson:* Surely you have gone too far?

Sherlock Holmes, who evinces no interest in romance or relationships with the female gender, tells Watson, out of the blue, that he is engaged.

I cannot imagine a more shocking revelation by Holmes. Perhaps if he admitted to being Jack the Ripper (or came back from the dead), but that's about it.

Is Watson stunned, shocked, speechless, nearly faint? Nope. He starts to congratulate Holmes.

I mean, really! Up is down, day is night, black is white: Sherlock Holmes is engaged. And Watson shows not one iota of surprise. I would put this forth as the single most improbable incident in the entirety of the Canon. Watson's response is completely inconsistent with the situation. Unless....

...Watson was aware that Holmes was presently on very close terms with a female. Though he agrees that the detective is not the marrying kind, Watson's unsurprising acceptance that Holmes is engaged would be explained if there was a woman already in the picture.

Then, Watson's most natural response would be congratulations to Holmes. However, Holmes reveals that his intended is Milverton's housemaid (Agatha). Now Watson explodes with surprise and indignation: "Good heavens, Holmes!" The engagement is to the wrong person.

Holmes explains that he needed information. Watson's "Surely you have gone too far?" is not about Agatha. Watson is referring to the effect his actions will have regarding his lady friend and their relationship.

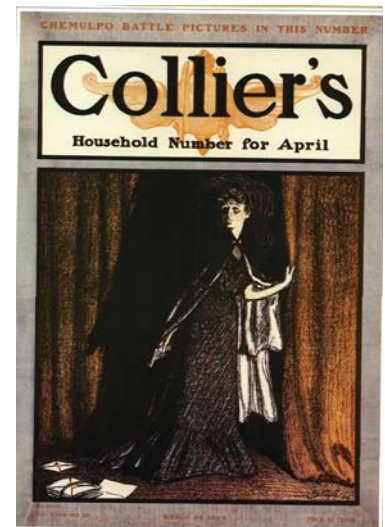
Holmes explains that he has gotten the information he needs; the ends justifies the means. Watson asks, "But the girl, Holmes?"

Is Watson referring to Agatha, or is he asking about the mysterious lady in Holmes' life? Either is possible. Holmes turns the conversation to the weather and his burglary plans. Watson, taking the hint, lets the matter drop.

Watson's lack of surprise at Holmes' engagement is understandable if he thought there was already a woman in Holmes' life. If we accept this premise, then Watson's subsequent shock when he learns that it is Milverton's maid who Holmes has wooed, rather than this other woman, is perfectly logical.

Speculation as to who that woman could be is fodder for another time and place (though I myself now look at *The Abbey Grange* a bit differently).

**"Watson's lack of surprise at Holmes' engagement is understandable if he thought there was already a woman in Holmes' life."**



## Some Thoughts Regarding *His Last Bow* (LAST)

### Martha (Hudson?)

Von Bork's lone remaining servant is an elderly woman named Martha. Vincent Starrett and Edgar Smith, among others, assert that this is none other than the esteemed Mrs. Hudson, longtime landlady of 221B Baker Street. They both also believe that the elderly housekeeper employed by Holmes at his Sussex Down retirement cottage is Mrs. Hudson.

William Hyder, in *The Martha Myth*, points out flaws in these assertions. Catherine Cooke follows up in more detail in the award winning *Mrs. Hudson: A Legend in Her Own Lodging House*. Both of these articles were published in the *Baker Street Journal* and are well worth reading.

Addressing only *His Last Bow*, I believe that the "Martha as Mrs. Hudson" is wishful thinking. Upon reading the story, I had four obvious problems with the premise:

*If Martha really were Mrs. Hudson, why didn't Holmes identify her as such?*

The story features a reunion of old friends. Wouldn't Mrs. Hudson have been included with a reference more intimate than as just being a servant? There is no indication at all that Holmes and Watson lived for years under Martha's roof. What could be the reason for Holmes to not identify Martha as being the same person as Mrs. Hudson? Because she wasn't!

*Holmes would not call Mrs. Hudson by her first name.*

Holmes and Watson never refer to Mrs. Hudson by her first name. She is either 'Mrs. Hudson' or their landlady. Calling her by her first name in 1914 seems completely out of character for Holmes and heavily mitigates against Martha being Mrs. Hudson.

*Mrs. Hudson would not likely refer to a German spy as a "kind master."*

No matter how polite Von Bork may have been to her, she would most certainly see him as a villain. Unless her feelings for England did not run very deep? Perish the thought.

*Watson gives no sign that he knows Martha.*

Ignoring the first point above, why didn't Watson make some recognition of his former landlady? There is no hint that Watson and Martha have met before. Surely either Holmes or Watson would have made some type of reference to their past association and years together.

Since *His Last Bow* is written in the third person, it is not certain if either Holmes or Watson is the author. Assuming it was Watson (he did definitely write 56 of the 60 stories in the Canon), how could he not have inserted some typical Watsonian comment like "It warmed my heart to see our former landlady again assisting Holmes, as she did in the Moran affair," or "For just a moment, standing with Sherlock Holmes and our former landlady, I felt as if we had returned to a simpler time." The evidence weighs against, not for, Martha being Mrs. Hudson.

### So, What's That Combination Again?

Since Holmes indicates that Von Bork was too clever for the British government to identify, we can assume that he truly was a master spy. One has to wonder, then, why he would so freely tell Altamont the combination to his safe. Von Bork is leaving the next day and the safe will be empty, but it still seems a bit out of character for a man who, living a double life, certainly kept valuable secrets so well that others did not even suspect he had them, let alone what they were. Old habits should die hard. Rather convenient for Holmes that the German (granted, bragging), gives him the combination.



In telling him the combination, Von Bork apparently had no suspicions of Altamont. In light of the fact that five of his operatives had been captured since Altamont started working for him. It can be wise to distrust coincidences!

### No More Holmes?

Doyle intended *His Last Bow* to be his final Sherlock Holmes story. It would be seven more years before *The Illustrious Client* appeared. The "east wind" exchange certainly feels like a goodbye scene for the two men, with Watson not quite getting it one final time. The dialogue was incorporated into Basil Rathbone's *Sherlock Holmes & The Voice of Terror*.



### Whither the Missing Securities?

John Neligan's father had set off with a tin box full of securities that he had taken from his bank. Black Peter Carey sold some of the missing securities in London. After everything has been cleared up, Holmes tells Hopkins to return the tin box to John Neligan, noting that the securities that Peter Carey had sold were lost forever. Can this be taken to imply that the remaining securities were in the tin? If they weren't, wouldn't Holmes have commented on them as well? And perhaps contributed something more profound than explaining that the securities already sold are gone?

But if the missing securities were in the tin, how would they become the possession of John Neligan? It would be a strange case of law that granted ownership of stolen securities to the son of their embezzler. Shouldn't the recovered securities be returned to the banking firm they were taken from?

But perhaps the missing securities weren't in the tin. Of course, Patrick Cairns would be thoroughly grilled about this since he stole the box and admitted he opened it. In addition, would-

## Some Thoughts Regarding *Black Peter* (BLAC)

n't Hopkins wonder about their location? Why wouldn't Holmes or Watson broach the issue? A thorough search of Black Peter's cabin would be in order, likewise wherever Patrick Cairns was staying. Did everyone simply assume that they were lost forever?

A third option that we will not explore further here is that Neligan senior sold some of the securities before encountering Peter Carey. Carey sold the remainder; thus, there were no securities left in the tin box. Speculation on this aspect would significantly extend the length of this entry.

So, either the remaining securities were in the tin and John Neligan was going to attempt to restore his father's name, or: they weren't in the tin and no one was overtly interested in

them. Did Sherlock Holmes have an ulterior motive regarding the missing securities...? Let us look at a possibly related curious aspect next.

### Norway?

The final sentence in *The Adventure of Black Peter* is one of the most intriguing in the entire Canon. The case has been solved, the murderer has been cuffed and an innocent man will shortly be freed.

Saying farewell to Inspector Hopkins, Holmes utters, "If you want me for the trial, my address and that of Watson will be somewhere in Norway – I'll send particulars later."

Regarding the case as we know it, there is absolutely no reason for Holmes and Watson to go to Norway. Patrick Cairns reports that Neligan senior was picked up, alone on his boat, by the Sea Unicorn. Since the crew had set off in the dingy for the Norwegian coast, we are left with the impression that Neligan was adrift.

Why did Holmes go to Norway? It is extremely unlikely that Neligan ever got there. Since he still had the securities when he was picked up by the Sea Unicorn, it appears he was still on his way to whatever activities he set out to do. Did Holmes deduce something no else could figure out?





## Some Thoughts Regarding The Dying Detective (DYIN)

### Some Ponderings

*The Dying Detective* seems to generate some questions:

Didn't Watson wonder why Holmes waited three days before summoning Culverton Smith? Did he attribute Holmes' delay in seeking help to his delusional state?

Would Watson really stay hidden behind the bed if he believed Holmes was breathing his last? Could he remain there for Holmes' last few moments of life, or would he spring out to share a final few moments with his friend?

Wouldn't Watson jump up and subdue Smith when the latter took the box that he believed killed Holmes? That is pretty important evidence.

Couldn't this be considered Holmes' weakest case? He lies in bed and pretends to be dying. The villain considerably comes to him and confesses that he killed his own nephew. The wait-



ing Inspector Morton then arrests Culverton Smith. What detecting did Holmes really do?

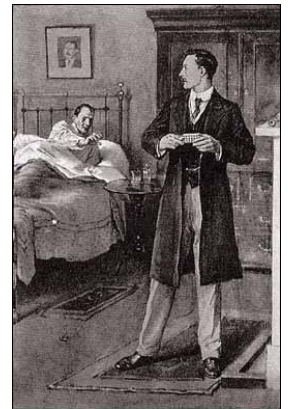
Smith is a planter in Indonesian Sumatra. Though Smith's nephew, Victor Savage, dies in London, is there a linkage between the mysterious 'Giant Rat of Sumatra' mentioned in *The Sussex Vampire* and Culverton Smith?

Holmes' ramblings about oysters are amusing. Perhaps he had previously pondered a monograph upon the subject?

Holmes has a connip-tion fit when Watson picks up the ivory box which contained the poison

trap. Yet Holmes tells Inspector Morton to remove the box from Smith's pocket. We can assume that Holmes' "Thank you" was said in response to Morton doing just that.

After it has been removed, Holmes warns Morton to be careful with it. Doesn't this seem reckless of Holmes? Based on Holmes' reaction when Watson picked it up, surely Morton was endangered by fishing around in Smith's pocket for the box.



## Some Thoughts Regarding The Bruce Partington Plans (BRUC)

### Depicting Mycroft in BRUC

Arthur Twiddle illustrated *The Bruce Partington Plans* for *The Strand*. He drew Mycroft visiting Baker Street, depicting Holmes and Watson seated as the senior Holmes enters, Lestrade visible behind him.

Mycroft looks like nothing so much as a sharp-nosed penguin in this drawing (This is not a critique of Twiddle, whose illustrations are quite good, especially his depiction of doc-

tor Watson). One can picture Mycroft in the black and white outfit of a penguin, waddling into the room. For me, I had this image immediately and have never gotten it out of my head when reading the story.

There is a resemblance between this drawing and Robert Morley, the actor who portrayed Mycroft in *A Study in Terror*. Morley may be best known as playing Katherine Hepburn's brother in *The African Queen*, though he died early in the film.

## Some Thoughts Regarding *The Second Stain* (SECO)

### **Spy, Spy, Who's the Spy?**

There is a seemingly innocuous statement near the end of *The Adventure of the Second Stain* that is curiously ignored by Holmes and Watson. However, it should have been considered of the greatest importance.

A refresher of events: A top secret document, a letter written by a foreign ruler (presumably Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II) contains some injudicious comments that could result in war if they are made public. Secretary for European Affairs Trelawney Hope takes the document home, rather than leave it in the office safe. Apparently he learned document security principles from Arthur Holder of Beryl Coronet fame. The document disappears from the locked dispatch box in Hope's bedroom: Calamity looms.

Holmes investigates and confronts the Secretary's wife, Lady Hilda. At first denying everything, then fully confessing all, she explains how she came to give the missing document to Eduardo Lucas, an international

espionage agent.

Lucas had obtained an indiscreet letter written by Lady Hilda before she had met her husband (Victorian women seemed to be working overtime writing compromising letters that kept blackmailers like Charles Augustus Milverton and Eduardo Lucas in business).

Convinced that Trelawney Hope would not understand the letter and her marriage would be ruined, Lady Hilda was determined that he not learn of it. This opens the door for Lucas to conduct his business. He demands that she bring him a certain document in exchange for the letter.

Now we get to the crux of matters: How could Lucas know about this top secret document? Because, as Lady Hilda tells Holmes, "*He had some spy in the office who had told him of its existence.*"

Goodness, what a bombshell! For did not Lord Hope tell Holmes that "only two, possibly



three" people in the office knew about the document? Surely these were individuals holding high-ranking positions: why else would they be privy to such a sensitive matter? But even if it were a clerk, there is a spy at the top levels of the Foreign Office and neither Holmes nor Watson appears to bat an eye. Is this realistic? Of course not!

Holmes surely found a way to inform his brother Mycroft what he had learned. It is uncertain whether or not he would have to shield Lady Hilda from his brother, though that is quite possible. Mycroft might deem

## Some Thoughts Regarding *The Bruce Partington Plans* (BRUC) cont.

### **The Helpful Thief?**

Hugo Oberstein seems to be a bit inept as far as master spies go. Holmes, after carefully searching Oberstein's recent lodgings for an hour, has found nothing. However, the last item Holmes looks at is a tin cash box. One would think a box that

he has to "prise open" would have been examined a little earlier, though...

Fortunately for Holmes, Oberstein has left a rather complete record behind by considerably stuffing an envelope with all of the agony column advertise-

ments used in communication with his accomplice in crime. Why in the world would Oberstein remove all possible incriminating evidence, but neglect this rather damning bit? What could possibly be a reasonable explanation? Outright stupidity would preclude his becoming a master espionage agent in the

## Some Thoughts Regarding *The Second Stain* (SECO) cont.

Hope's professional fitness lessened because of the dangers presented by his wife's possible actions.

Regardless, it would border on treasonous for Holmes to not take action regarding the duplicitous informer. And surely such a staunch patriot as Watson would insist that Holmes do something. One can almost envision Watson telling Holmes "For if you do not, I most certainly will!" Mycroft is the most logical person for Holmes to approach.

It is reasonable to assume that Sherlock Holmes did go to his brother Mycroft with news of the informer. Mycroft would have put his well-oiled machinations into place and taken care of the problem efficiently and effectively with no one the wiser. Watson's glossing over of the matter in his published account of *The Second Stain* makes sense. He certainly wouldn't want to dwell on such a sensitive topic.

In fact, we are left to wonder why he mentioned it at all? He could just as easily have left that

sentence out of his writings. Perhaps, embedded in the overall story, it slipped past Watson's notice and the notice of his editors. That seems unlikely, but the fact remains that it is there for all to read. But we can take solace in knowing that Sherlock Holmes wouldn't turn a blind eye to a top level government informer.

### **Was He That Gullible?**

It's impossible to look at this case without noting Lord Trelawney Hope's ready acceptance that he had overlooked the letter and it was in the dispatch box the entire time. Honestly, can we simply accept that? When he didn't find the papers by simply

shuffling through them, wouldn't he have carefully laid them all out on his desk? He had to have thoroughly examined each paper to make sure the missing letter wasn't somehow mixed in.

When once you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Well, he looked for letter, it wasn't there, then later, it was. Someone must have taken the letter and put it back. Isn't that more likely than Lord Hope being completely incompetent?

Hope has to suspect that someone inside the house took and then returned the letter. Holmes has assured him that all was well without offering any details of the letter's recovery. Surely Hope must wonder about his wife's possible complicity. But maybe, with Holmes' assurance that the matter is completely over with and no damage done, Hope is willing to bury his suspicions of his wife and continue on as if nothing happened.

This is probably preferable to believing that he is rather clueless, as the reader must think from the published account.

**"Isn't that more likely  
than Lord Hope being  
completely  
incompetent?"**

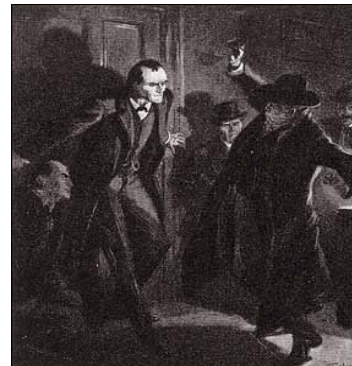


## Some Thoughts Regarding *The Bruce Partington Plans* (BRUC) cont.

first place, so we will rule that out.

The only moderately viable one that comes to mind is that Holmes was actually led to Colonel Valentine Walter through some means that could not be revealed publicly. Perhaps an important personage

would be exposed, or political complications prevented the truth to be told. Watson needed to somehow explain how Holmes could bait the thief to come to him. So, he fabricated the newspaper clippings, thus moving the story forward within the limitations he was working under. This seems more likely than Oberstein's colossal gaffe.



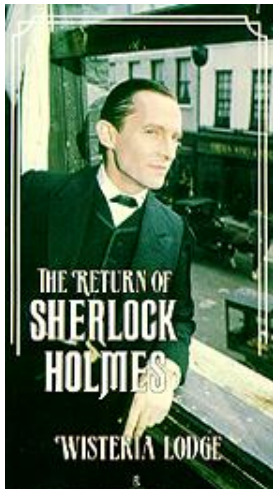


## Some Thoughts Regarding Wisteria Lodge (WIST)

### **What's in a Name?**

A few stories in the Canon have minor oddities regarding their names. This is definitely one of them. It made its first appearance in the August, 1908 *Collier's Magazine* as *The Singular Experience of Mr. J. Scott Eccles*. This is certainly an unconventional title among the sixty Holmes stories Doyle wrote.

In England, the *Strand Magazine* titled it *A Reminiscence of Mr. Sherlock Holmes*, with the first part of the story appearing in the September, 1908 issue as *The Singular Experience of Mr. J. Scott Eccles*. The second part followed the next month, called *The Tiger of San Pedro*. When the story was included in omnibus and book form, it was re-titled *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge*, which is certainly more conventional.



### **The Tiger isn't That Cunning**

Watson states that Don Murillo was "as cunning as he was cruel." However, there are a few aspects of Murillo's actions that leave one wondering how he avoided his hunters for so long. While he did escape the difficulties at High Gable, he seems to have made some mistakes.

### *Garcia's Body*

Murillo and his secretary/bodyguard Lopez decide to leave the body of Garcia out in the field, believing that his death might frighten off any further pursuit. That seems like a highly unlikely assumption. One would-be assassin had already been killed and Murillo and his household had fled across Europe to avoid his pursuers. While there may have been advantages to leaving the body out

on the commons, Murillo could not have believed the people after him would simply give up because someone was killed in an attempt on the Tiger of San Pedro's life.

### *Miss Burnet*

Murillo and Lopez consider killing the traitorous Miss Burnet but decide it is too dangerous to murder her.

There is some logic in that. However, drugging her and dragging her along on their escape seems rather laborious. They are going to have to kill her and dispose of the body somewhere along the way. She has betrayed them and remains a danger to not just their liberty, but to their very lives.



Obviously, she is a threat if she escapes: which she does! She then reveals all to Holmes and Baynes. So, keeping her alive and taking her along doesn't seem to do them much good in the end. Even if she hadn't escaped, what were they going to do with her? Would her body be found in some luggage? Would Miss Burnet become one of England's famous railway trunk murders? Probably not. She would more likely have been quietly done away with and quietly dumped somewhere.

Could there not have been some scenario in which she was killed and her body placed with Garcia's? She could also be bludgeoned to death, making it appear that Garcia and Burnet had an assignation which some third

party brutally terminated. True, this would bring Murillo, as her employer, to the attention of the authorities. But he would seem to be at minimal risk. And since he was apparently determined to flee High Gable, his need to remain low profile was at an end anyways.

### *Garcia's Address*

Murillo's henchman Lopez also comes off as not quite as bright as he could be. Lopez sneaks up and subdues Miss Burnet just as she is finishing writing her note to Garcia. He and Murillo then rough her up to get the recipient's address. As D. Martin Dakin points out, it would have made more sense if Lopez had simply let Burnet address the note and then pounce on her. Perhaps he was a spurned suitor and enjoyed roughing her up.

One of the men must then address the note. Holmes points out that the address is written thicker and bolder than the note itself. Did Garcia notice this? If so, did he take any additional precautions? If he did, they were obviously inadequate.

### **What Happened to the Daughters?**

What happened to the two children of Don Murillo? They are not mentioned when Warner reports what happened at the station, nor does Miss Burnet say anything about them when describing her escape. They are not visible in Arthur Twidle's illustration of the scene from *The Strand*. Surely Murillo did not simply abandon them after keeping them with him during his previous travels. There is no mention of them when Murillo



## Some Thoughts Regarding *Wisteria Lodge* cont.

and Lopez are found murdered in their Madrid hotel room. It is as if they simply disappeared.

Were they shepherded along; treated more or less as luggage for the trip and ignored when they asked why their governess was acting so strangely, or why she got off the train and wasn't coming with them? Murillo could not send them back to San Pedro; surely they would be made to pay for their father's sins. It does not sound as if Murillo had many confidantes he could trust. He was too busy killing potential rivals within his administration. Did they one day cross Holmes' path again, the events untold by his faithful Boswell?

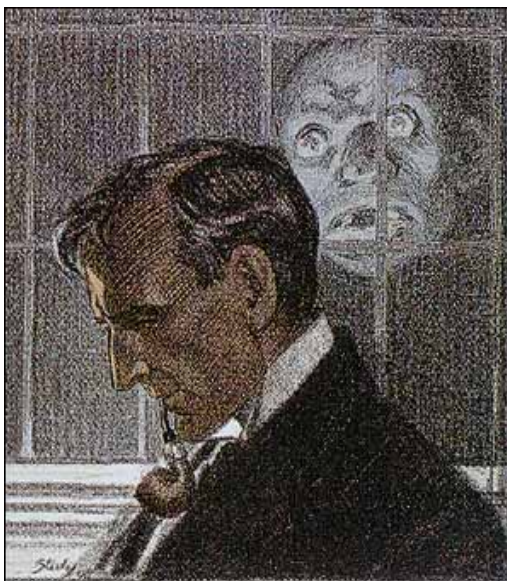
### **Best of the Bunch**

Inspector Baynes certainly stands out in this case. Holmes lays his hand on the inspector's shoulder and says, "You will rise high in your profession. You have instinct and intuition." This is the supreme instance of Holmes lavishing praise on a member of the official police

force.

Far more typical is Holmes' comment that "local aid is either useless or biased." The Canon is replete with Holmes' uncomplimentary comments about Lesterade, Gregson, Hopkins, Athelney Jones and the like. The phrase 'damning with faint praise' often applied to Holmes' more generous assessments of the police.

Baynes' inquiries kept pace with Holmes' throughout the case. When Holmes was prowling around High Gable looking for clues, Baynes was sitting in a tree watching him. And it was Baynes who arrested one of Garcia's servants so that Murillo would think that the police were looking elsewhere and make a run for it. This is the only tale in the Canon where it appears that the local constabulary might well have solved the case without Holmes' assistance. Truly, that is attributable to the impressive Inspector Baynes.

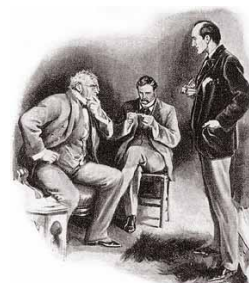


## Illustrating *Wisteria Lodge*



Frederic Dorr Steele drew 7 pictures for what has become known as *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge*, including a macabre picture of Garcia's mulatto servant looking through the window at Holmes (the profile clearly calling to mind William Gillette). This scene (left) never actually occurred during the story, but it is certainly an arresting drawing.

Arthur Twidle provided 10 drawings for *The Strand's* publication of *Wisteria Lodge*. He was the first illustrator to draw Holmes for *The Strand* following Sidney Paget's death. Twidle also illustrated the *Bruce Partington Plans*.



**"This is the only tale in the Canon where it appears that the local constabulary might well have solved the case without Holmes' assistance"**



## Pictures Can Tell a Different Story...

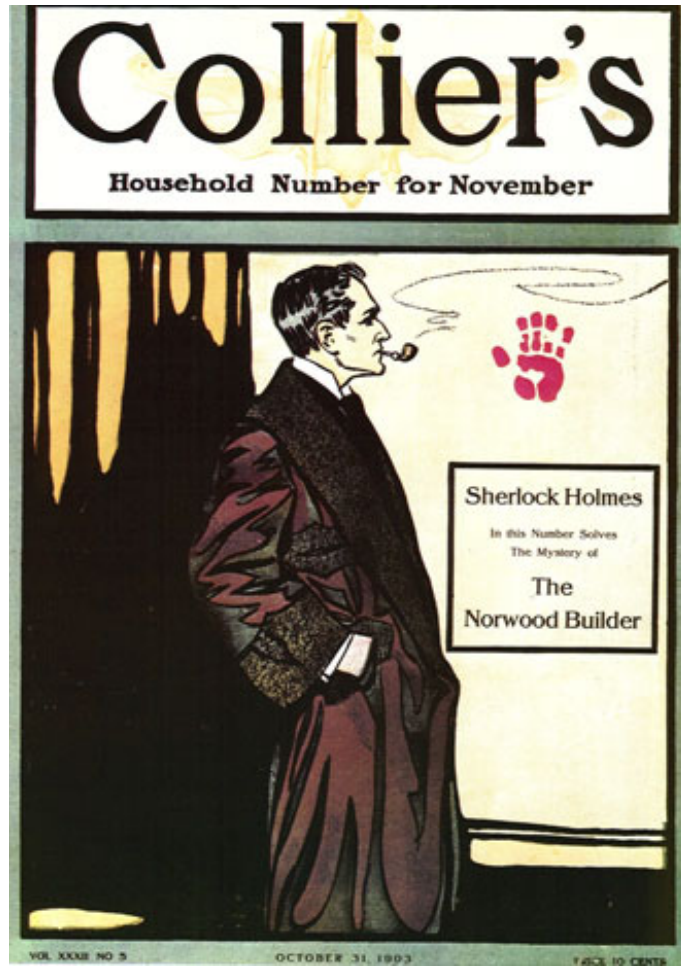
Illustrations that accompany the Canon cannot be relied upon with complete assurances. An example below is Lee Conrey's eye-catching drawing from the January, 1914, *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. It is for *The Dying Detective*, a case in which Holmes did **not** use a mask to trick Culverton Smith into believing that he was near death.





## ...And That's the Rest of the Story

Another example involves Frederic Dorr Steele, who did not always adhere to the precise details of the story when providing his illustrations (see *Illustrating Wisteria Lodge*). Below is his color drawing for the October, 1903 cover of *Collier's*. Holmes is examining the famous bloody thumb print on the wall. Of course, the rest of the hand is represented, meaning that the entire hand (supposedly of John Hector McFarlane) would have to be covered in blood. That's not quite how the story reads.



However, the illustration below, also by Dorr Steele, is from the interior of that same issue. Though the details are not visible due to picture quality, in this drawing, Holmes is examining a single thumb print on the wall. This is certainly more authentic, but it does not make for nearly as impressive a cover!



# Baker Street Essays

## The Canon examined

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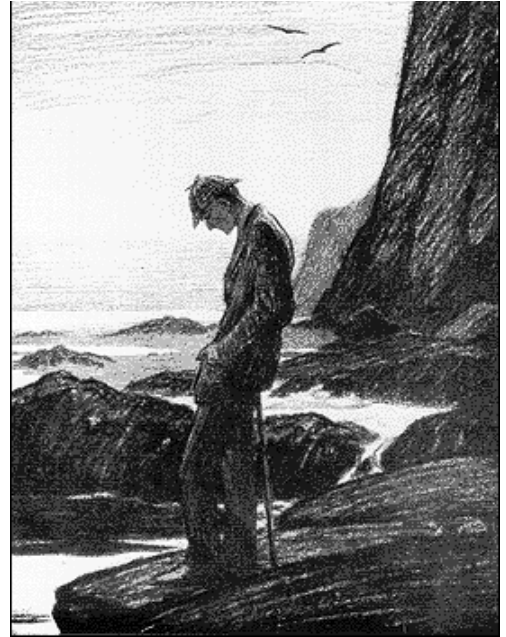
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## Illustrators of the Canon: Frank Wiles

In 1914, Frank Wiles provided 31 illustrations for *The Strand's* publication of *The Valley of Fear*. Wiles' color picture of Holmes studying Porlock's cipher is still easily identifiable today.

He also provided 11 more drawings in *The Strand* for the final three Holmes stories, *The Veiled Lodger*, *Shoscombe Old Place* and *The Retired Colourman*.

The final two illustrations for *Shoscombe Old Place* depict Holmes wearing his deerstalker. These are the last drawings in the Canon featuring the detective in his distinctive headgear.



Frank Wiles from *The Veiled Lodger*

Wiles captured the lean, sharp-faced Holmes described by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It also is a slightly older detective with a prominent forehead, fitting for these latter stories.

Wiles' drawings were also incorporated into *Strand* covers featuring *The Valley of Fear* (below) and *The Retired Colourman* (far left).



Frank Wiles from *Shoscombe Old Place*

