

A TREASURY OF Sherlock Holmes

BY SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Selected and with an Introduction by Adrian Conan Doyle

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A TREASURY OF
Sherlock Holmes

Introduction

I must commence with a confession. When our old friends at Hanover House asked me to select the contents of this volume, common decency demanded that I should shrink away from the awful vision of coals of fire showering down upon my head from those whose favourites had been omitted. Instead, and I admit it brazenly, I pounced upon the opportunity to air my own views on the pros and cons of the Sherlock Holmes stories. And why not? Do not bulls have fun in china shops and old-fashioned gentlemen take potshots at each other in the Bois de Boulogne over the merits of a woman's face or any other contentious work of art? So let us agree to uphold our views, pistol in hand or, if you insist, with a heavy vase, preferably Victorian.

That being understood, I must explain at once that I have based my selection partly on my own "feel" for the stories and partly on the conversations that I had with my father on this very subject, for I consider that the views of the author himself should not be omitted when picking over the contents of what amounts to a literary treasure chest.

The strength of the plot, the aptitude of Holmes's deductions drawn from clues which, with scrupulous fairness, are always laid before the reader, and finally the strongly individual atmosphere pervading each story, these factors must in themselves play a dominant part in any selection because they are representative of three out of the four basic elements from which the Saga is woven. Plot, characteristic, atmosphere, and—truth. We will deal with the last element anon.

In choosing the contents of this book, I struck one snag at the very start. It seemed to me that the inclusion of all four of the long novels was an absolute "must," but the publishers, cunning as Solomon when proposing the division of the baby, thought otherwise and hence, after much weighing in the balance, I have omitted, but under protest, *The Sign of the Four* and *The Valley of Fear*. Frankly, I do not consider that *A Study in Scarlet* is as good a yarn, but its inclusion is quite necessary both as an introduction to Holmes the Man and to Holmes the Deductive Machine.

The omission of *The Valley of Fear* is all the more regrettable because it is an instance of my father's rare power of combining in one novel a complete Holmes story cheek by jowl with an incident of American history which, if localised, nevertheless springs into such vivid life under the pen of a master that one might look long before discovering, amid all the flash and thunder of dramatic literature, any single incident more thrilling to the reader than those four quiet words, "I am Birdy Edwards."

In common with a great many other people, I consider *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to be greatest of all the Sherlock Holmes stories. Here we have each of the basic elements at its best. The plot itself is highly original, building up in successive layers from the trifling incident of Dr. Mortimer's stick, which affords Holmes a heaven-sent opportunity to expose not merely Watson's lack of perception but that of the reader, who has all the facts before him. But above all it is atmosphere, perhaps the supreme book of atmosphere in detective fiction. The loneliness of Dartmoor, the long russet-coloured ridges surrounding that ill-omened house with its dark yew alley, the whole gloomy picture overshadows the reader's mind with the impact of a living episode. And that is as it should be. When my father wrote this book, his Celtic nature was reacting strongly to the legend of the phantom hound that his friend Fletcher Robinson had mentioned to him during their homeward voyage from the Boer War, and perhaps even more to those lonely days that he had spent tramping the moors or sitting on the tors, consuming Holmesian quantities of pipe tobacco while he jotted down in a notebook his impressions of that bleak yet wonderful landscape. The Hound—the very word is enough. A lesser man might have called it the Dog. What a horrible thought!

To turn to the short stories, *The Red-Headed League* and *The Adventure of the Six Napoleons* are in for their originality of plot, and the famous *A Scandal in Bohemia* is out because I do not consider that it is in any way a representative Holmes story. Though a good yarn, it has none of the essential elements.

For their qualities of suspense, I have chosen *The Adventure of the Empty House*, *The Five Orange Pips*, *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*, and *The Adventure of the Dying Detective*; while *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*, *The Naval Treaty*, *The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet*, and *Silver Blaze* must rightfully take their places as strong, finely presented stories inlaid, if I may use the term, with the mosaic of deduction.

In his biography of my father, John Dickson Carr described *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as "written in gothic twilight," and I think that this noble expression is also applicable, though to a lesser degree, to

the atmosphere of *The Musgrave Ritual*, *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, and *The Adventure of Black Peter*, tales which, though lacking in both, boil and swirl with the very essence of a Baker Street fog and the starkness of a Dartmoor skyline. They are examples of the Holmes story par excellence.

For that joyous combination of plot, narration, and the general prowess of the Master, I have included *The Reigate Puzzle*, *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton*, *The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb*, *The Adventure of the Second Stain*, and *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange* and, on a lower level, *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone*, *The Problem of Thor Bridge*, *The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place* and *The Adventure of the Devil's Foot*.

To omit Moriarty or Mycroft Holmes would be perilously close to blasphemy and in any case I consider that both stories are masterpieces in their own right, hence the presence of *The Greek Interpreter* and *The Final Problem*.

The Gloria Scott can also claim a place of its own, for was not this Holmes's first case and suitably rich in those essential ingredients?

The Adventure of the Priory School is, in my view, one of the best of the whole Saga with its swiftly moving plot and power of deduction, while the incident of the bicycle tracks, in bringing back a vivid little memory from my youth, has a special meaning for me. I am standing with my father looking down at the wheel marks on a damp moorland track leading from a neighbour's house on Ashdown Forest. "Osmond has been out on his cycle," I said. "I wonder if he's called on us." "Do try to be more observant, my dear lad," reproved my father kindly. "Osmond uses Palmer tyres. These are the marks of Dunlops."

His Last Bow? Well, of course it is in and I don't think that any very clear reason is required, for there's something wrong with the man who can close that final page without a pang of regret and even a mental "bless 'em both."

So much for my selection. That I have rejected many fine stories does not reflect discredit upon them. Selection must be always a matter of personal opinion and so, where I look in vain for the combination of those qualities that epitomise the Sherlock Holmes classic, another may discover what I have missed.

Plot, characteristic, atmosphere. There remains the fourth ingredient. Are these stories true? Hardly, and yet like a steel core there is an element of truth threading its way through them and it is this core that has added to their lasting quality. As I spent my youth in close association with my father and have occupied for many years the position of keeper of his voluminous biographical records and private papers, the reader will

perhaps bear with me on the grounds that I speak with some authority of the subject under review.

Fame has turned both Holmes and Watson not merely into living entities but, poor fellows, into Stoics through sheer necessity. It is said that Stevenson was victimised by no less than four fake "biographies" (as distinct from one genuine work) before the public outcry organized by my father, Kipling, and Rider Haggard put a stop to this, the foulest of all literary malpractices. That is, put a stop to it so far as Stevenson was concerned. My father himself was more fortunate with two genuine biographies—those of Dickson Carr and Dr. John Lamond—as against merely one fake "biography." But Holmes and Watson——! Probably more nonsense has been written on the subject of these two literary characters than on any historic personage, a fog of nonsense relieved here and there by the bright street lamps of H.W. Bell, Vincent Starrett, and a few, a very few, others. And yet the truth is there to hand, and it has been my experience that the intelligence of the reading public as a whole has perceived that truth much more clearly than those little groups of self-styled Holmes "experts" who, in their enthusiasm for the stories, are so busy inventing wild and, I regret to add, in some cases perverted theories that they have become far more blind to the obvious than ever was Watson in perceiving clues.

If we accept the worn-out ideas that have been built around the figure of Sherlock Holmes as a form of fun and games to revive the healthy memories of our nurseries, nothing could be better. Unfortunately, however, it has not stopped there and what was meant originally as a kind of enthusiasm has become, in some quarters, a deliberate effort to bolster the most far-fetched "theories" or any legend, however absurd, rather than place the credit where it rightly belongs. It is the supreme example of "putting the cart before the horse."

But the man who wishes to discover the truth, and by that I mean the real design that lies behind the Holmes stories, will find it in his power to do so. It is not necessary to swat up the stories until one can quote verbatim by the paragraph—an intelligent parrot can accomplish this with a little training—instead, he will study Holmes in conjunction with the life and accomplishments of that greater form that looms behind him, the figure of Holmes's creator. All the evidence is there. In Dickson Carr's *Life*, and let us remember that Carr alone had the entrée to Conan Doyle's gigantic collection of biographical papers and to his surviving associates and that every statement contained therein is drawn from the solid facts and not from any chosen conception of its author, in that fine book we find ourselves face to face with the first great truth—that Holmes was to a large extent Conan Doyle himself. Incidentally, and it stands to their credit in view of my father's reticence, this fact was recognized almost from the very first by the police chiefs of the world who, speaking or

writing from America, France, Germany, China, India, or Egypt, paid him tribute. The exception was, of course, Scotland Yard whose silence put to shame even that of the immortal Colonel Bramble. Scotland Yard owed too much to Conan Doyle and it is always painful to acknowledge large debts.

The use of plaster of Paris for preserving marks; the examination of dust in a man's clothing to establish his occupation or locality; the differentiation between tobacco ashes; all these were introduced into the science of criminal detection by my father through the mask of Sherlock Holmes. Far above all else, his own work in the famous Edalji case resulted in the introduction of the Court of Criminal Appeal into the British legal system. And to change the British legal system is almost equivalent to bailing out the English Channel with a teaspoon. The facts are there for all to read, including some noteworthy instances of my father rescuing the innocent from the clutches of the police by using the very methods which he had invented for his man in Baker Street.

It may be justly claimed that all this is quite obvious and that today no reasonable person can fail to identify the one figure with the other. But the story runs much deeper, and it is in searching out the tiny personal links that the genuine student of Sherlock Holmes will find himself upon a fascinating trail of exploration and discovery.

My father placed more than a dozen clues in the Holmes stories to identify himself, and I believe that Carr lists a number of these. But here, drawn from my own knowledge, are certain other particles of the design that have so far escaped the notice that they deserve.

Who was Watson? I do not mean the bumbling ass that is Hollywood's conception. I mean the *real* Watson of whom my father said to me in so many words on more than one occasion—"Those who consider Watson to be a fool are simply admitting that they haven't read the stories attentively. In practice, the averagely intelligent professional man would experience the same difficulty as Watson in reading clues, a fact which can be easily established if one were to give that part of a story to any educated man who had never read the tale and then, without allowing him to see Holmes's explanation, demand the deductions to which the clues have led him. He has all the facts before him and yet I should be surprised if he did any better than Watson. Deduction, rising from observation, is among the rarest of human qualities and yet we all have it latently within us."

Certainly Watson was no fool. He was a loyal active man with a normal intelligence and more than his fair share of courage. I may state at once that, with the exception of the name, Dr. James Watson of Southsea, Conan Doyle's early acquaintance, was not the Dr. Watson of the stories.

Watson lived without a doubt and there is no question in my mind from where my father drew the character. In the early eighties he formed

an acquaintanceship in Southsea with a certain Major W—. This Major W— was a perfect example of a certain type of Englishman, thick-shouldered and moustached, reasonably intelligent, a good sportsman, and so completely lacking in imagination or temperament as to be a perfect foil for my father—or for Holmes. When Conan Doyle moved to Norwood, Major W— often visited him and later, after he had established himself on the heights of Hindhead, my father took on Major W— as his private secretary. And in that capacity he remained with him right up to the end or, to be exact, to within two years of my father's death when "Watson" retired on pension and went back to Southsea. Incidentally, he was with my father when he investigated both the Edalji and Slater cases.

What significant fragments crop up in one's memory as one looks back. The very English face of Major W—; the fog of tobacco smoke in my father's study, all cluttered up with weird objects; the incident of the missing dumbbell which by rolling under an old cupboard touched off that train of thought in Conan Doyle's mind that resulted in the missing dumbbell of *The Valley of Fear*. I was too young to recall the incident itself, but I heard about it when I graduated from the nursery to the billiard room. And then the dark moat of "Birlstone Manor" with the autumn leaves floating on the water like shreds from old tapestries—the son of "Birlstone" was at the same tutor with me, and our fathers had been neighbours and friends for many years.

I have always regretted that I never visited Dartmoor in Conan Doyle's company, but at least I imbibed something of the same atmosphere during our long tramps together over the moors of Ashdown Forest, then a fairly desolate expanse of country, when his eyes were always on the watch for Stone Age arrowheads and other flints among the heather and for the marks of living creatures in low-lying damp spots such as Slaughter Glen of dubious memory.

While on the subject of the Ashdown moors, I am reminded of an amusing incident when I was out for a nocturnal ramble with the Hound. Tamerlane was not the original, but he might well have been if he had arrived a few years earlier, for he stood over seven feet on his hind legs and weighed some 180 pounds! The moon was shining on the moorland road and as I walked along I was overtaken by two labourers on bicycles on their way home from some pub. At that moment Tamerlane, who had bounded off on some excursion of his own, reappeared as a black silhouette on a hillock overlooking the road. "Look there, Bill" screeched a voice. "My God, the 'Ound of the Baskervilles!" And, without further parley, the two men bent over the handle bars and were gone like a flash. Tamerlane, that noble hound, lies buried today at the foot of my father's grave.

Houses, landscapes, and even the physical appearance of some of the characters in the stories were drawn from life and here again we strike

that core of truth, for he was an unsurpassed master at conveying to the mind of the reader the feel of a place or the appearance of a man with all the clarity but none of the verbosity that has tended to spoil for some people the undoubted genius of Conan Doyle's distant kinsman, Sir Walter Scott.

So far as he could feel any real affection for the Holmes stories, my father inclined toward the later tales and, as I had the privilege of actually hearing these read to me in their unfinished form after each day's work was over, I wish that I could share the same view. With the exception of *The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier* and *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman*, both of which I dislike, I can find the flavour of the old vintage and yet the bouquet is lacking. The deductions are as brilliant as ever and the plots full of originality but here is extraneous matter pushing its way through the door of 221 B, Baker Street. I resent the presence of jellyfish, sick men, and evilly disposed children on Holmes's doormat.

There is a fairly general illusion that my father actually disliked Holmes. Such is not the case. He disliked the situation that so much of his finer work tended to be obscured by his lesser. If only he could have peeped into the future his mind would have been at rest on this point, for *The White Company* and his other historical novels, as well as his non-Holmes short stories, which are perhaps his best writings, continue to run through so many editions that it is sometimes difficult for me as his Executor to keep count of them. My father could have reposed more confidence in the sound taste of the reading public throughout the world. To write a historical novel with that degree of accuracy that his craftsmanship demanded called for research and long study. It called for work. To write a Holmes story required little or nothing from him, and the only explanation that I can offer for this is that he had so much of Holmes in his own make-up that no great effort was required. Bearing in mind he wrote one story merely to pass the time, sitting in the pavilion at Lord's still wearing his batting pads while he waited for the rain to stop that had interrupted his cricket match.

Nevertheless, Holmes must have afforded him a considerable amount of enjoyment and interest, otherwise the atmosphere of the stories would lack that absolutely clear-cut lucidity that has given them the freshness of Immortality.

Those who have read my father's works, both fiction and non-fiction, need no telling that he understood human psychology and so it was obvious that if he did not wish to be personally identified with the character of Sherlock Holmes then he must create some perfectly simple signpost pointing in the opposite direction. And the simpler the signpost the more effective it would be—as in all human psychology. Take Watson's character from Major W— and then increase the size of his mous-

tache and the breadth of his frame to his own dimensions, later borne out in the style of the Paget sketches. Result . . . Conan Doyle. In this he was partly successful. The Holmes "experts" swallowed it, hook, line, and sinker. But the police chiefs did not nor did the more alert sections of the general public; nor, for that matter, did the ubiquitous Dr. Joseph Bell from whom he had drawn Holmes's physical appearance. "You are yourself Sherlock Holmes," wrote Dr. Bell accusingly.

The years have rolled by and yet from time to time fresh links are still brought to light through isolated incidents in other people's lives. A famous Coroner in writing his memoirs records an incident in which Conan Doyle deduces the truth from evidence that had misled others. The Marquis of Villavieja who was at school with my father recalls in his autobiography "that untidy boy with his strange power of observation."

And so it goes on.

Let those who, in their devotion to the Saga, have actually resented my father's authorship because it made fiction of Holmes and Watson, be comforted. For the truth is far more real than they have imagined, even in their fondest hopes. The houses and the rolling countrysides, the faces and the voices, some of the characters and some of the mysteries, all were there. And beneath the deerstalker of Baker Street and the cloth cap of Ashdown Forest there lived the same restless searching brain that wrought life out of fiction and fiction out of life.

Adrian Conan Doyle

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Sherlock Holmes

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A Study in Scarlet

PART ONE

Being a reprint from the reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D.,
late of the Army Medical Department

1 MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES

In the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London, and proceeded to Netley to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the Army. Having completed my studies there, I was duly attached to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers as assistant surgeon. The regiment was stationed in India at the time, and before I could join it, the second Afghan war had broken out. On landing at Bombay, I learned that my corps had advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy's country. I followed, however, with many other officers who were in the same situation as myself, and succeeded in reaching Candahar in safety, where I found my regiment, and at once entered upon my new duties.

The campaign brought honours and promotion to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster. I was removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires, with whom I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly, who threw me across a pack-horse, and succeeded in bringing me safely to the British lines.

Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawur. Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the veranda, when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in