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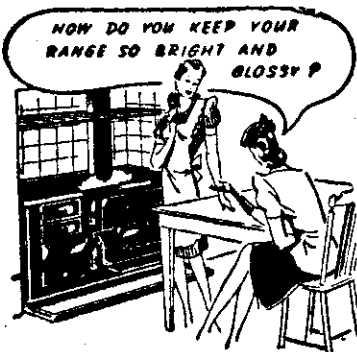
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# THE PARSLEY IN THE BUTTER

## Sherlock Holmes is Back in the News

A number of hitherto unpublished Sherlock Holmes manuscripts by Conan Doyle were discovered when Mr. Adrian Conan Doyle, son of the author, went to a bank at Crowborough, Sussex, to remove papers which his father had stored there in 1922, eight years before his death.—Cable message.

**W**HEN John H. Watson, M.D., late of the Indian Army, also known as Arthur Conan Doyle, died in 1930, a wave of regret went round the world, but also a wind of hope. What about his papers? For years devotees had been thinking of these depositories of Holmes-Watson cases. They remembered that "somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered tin despatch box with my name" painted on it, "crammed with papers," nearly all relating to problems brought before Holmes. There were unsolved cases. There were records involving family secrets to such an extent that the papers would have to be destroyed, and others "which I might have edited before had I not feared to give the public a surfeit which might react upon the reputation of the man above whom all others I revere."

Among these unfinished tales is that of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world. No less remarkable is that of the cutter "Alicia," which sailed on a spring morning into a small patch of mist from where she never again emerged, nor was anything further ever heard of herself and her crew. A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match-box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm, said to be unknown to science.

Yet that could not be all, for in another place Watson, referring to his association with Holmes for 17 out of 23 years of his active practice, mentions "the long row of year-books which filled a shelf" and "despatch boxes filled with documents, a perfect quarry for the student not only of crime but of the social and official secrets of the late Victorian era." Holmes "had a horror of destroying documents, especially when they were concerned with his best cases."

Scattered through the tales are many references which sharpen our appetite. There were

the adventure of the *Paradol Chamber*, of the *Amateur Mendicant Society*, who held a *luxurious club* in the lower vault of a *furniture warehouse*, of the facts connected with the loss of the *British barque "Sophy Anderson,"* of the singular adventures of the *Grice Patersons* on the island of *Uffa*, and finally of the *Camberwell poisoning case*. . . . There was the shocking affair of the *Dutch steamship Friesland* which so nearly cost us both our lives.

In 1895 Holmes's activities ranged from investigation of the sudden death of Cardinal Tosca, undertaken at the express desire of his Holiness the Pope, to the arrest of

Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer, which removed a plague-spot from the

East End of London. . . . As I turn over the pages I see my notes upon the repulsive story of the red leech and the terrible death of Crosby the banker. Here also I find an account of the Addleton tragedy and the singular contents of the ancient British barrow.

### Carelessness in Baker Street

For a long time Holmes and Watson seem to have kept their "files" in their rooms in Baker Street. Watson writes of looking at "the three massive manuscript volumes which contain our work for the year 1894." Seeing how many Royal houses and leading families were

Written for "The Listener" by  
**ALAN MULGAN**

involved in these cases, this seems to have been rather careless. Indeed Watson tells us attempts were made to get at and destroy the papers.

The source of these outrages is known, and if they are repeated I have Mr. Holmes's authority for saying that the whole story concerning the politician, the lighthouse and the trained cormorant, will be given to the public.

Let us hope it will be in any case. But the reference that excites me above all others is this:

You will remember Watson, how the dreadful business of the Abernethy family was first brought to my notice by the depth to which the parsley had sunk into the butter upon a hot day.

Now comes this news of Holmes documents in a bank at Crowborough, Sussex, placed there by Watson-Doyle in 1922, and now removed by his son. Hope springs up afresh. Are we at last to know the facts about "the singular affair of the aluminium crutch, and Ricoletti of the club foot and his abominable wife?"

But is there not something curious in this affair? Why did Watson put these documents there when he already had a deposit at Cox's in London, and why have they lain there so long? The suggestion that the authorities were waiting for Holmes to come along and work out the combination of Watson's special safe, but that Holmes was too busy in Hollywood, I regard as frivolous. Did Watson mix up Cox's and Crowborough, and are there other deposits?

### Watson the Erratic

For Watson, you should be informed, if you haven't already deduced it, was a careless chronicler. His chronology in the tales is at times highly unsatisfactory, and has puzzled a number of commentators. In *The Final Problem*, where he "kills" Holmes, Watson hears about Moriarty for the first time, but after bringing Holmes back to life, he writes a long story about Holmes and the Professor which antedates this. Watson couldn't even be accurate about himself. In the first tale he has been wounded in the shoulder in Afghanistan; in the second the wound makes him lame. And though his first name is John, in a later story he refers to himself as James. Indeed it is considered that Watson never wrote some of the stories at all. Monsignor Ronald Knox, submitting the

tales to an analysis on Higher Criticism lines, concludes that there is a genuine and a bogus Holmes corpus. A. A. Milne rejects the whole of *The Case Book*. Poor Watson seems to cut such a figure



generally that a biographer has come to his rescue, as others have to Boswell's and that eminent critic Desmond MacCarthy claims for him that he was "the most representative Englishman of the latter half of the 19th Century."

### The Same Thing to All Men

What do I mean by all this? What is all this talk about the lives of two characters who are purely fictional? Surely men don't go to the trouble of analysing the doings and dispositions of two imaginary persons as if they were real, two persons who exist only in the pages of a series of popular detective stories? They do. It is true that this work is done mainly in a spirit of fun, but there is little or nothing that is derisory about it. It is affectionate fun. And it would not be done at all if it were not for the enormous vogue of the Holmes tales, and the extraordinary place Holmes has taken in the mind of the world. For to a great many people Holmes is a real person. The editor of the *Geneva Journal* in which an account of the "death" of Holmes appeared, used to get applications for cuttings of the report, and perhaps does so still. When Conan Doyle visited France in the first war, a French general asked him if Sherlock Holmes was serving with the British Army. Taken aback, Doyle stammered in reply that Holmes was over age.

There is a larger public to whom he is half-real, half-imaginary. We feel this way about creations of the great novelists—Dickens for example. Our reason tells us they never existed save in the book; our imagination gives them real life. Doyle was not a great novelist, though he was a better one than many people think, but he did achieve by a sort of accident what only a very few writers have achieved—he gave the world a character that is recognised everywhere. Just as everybody knows what is meant by a reference to Shylock, so everybody knows what is meant by Sherlock Holmes. So there have been visitors from the Continent to London who asked first to be taken to Baker Street. I have known a young New Zealander show the same desire. The roaring popularity goes on. Some years ago, and it may still be working, a fiction factory in Barcelona, employing a score of hacks, was turning out "Sherlock Ol-mes" adventures by the hundred. Although, if Holmes was "alive" he would be nearly a hundred (careful study of evidence in the tales puts his birth at about 1852) he works for the screen in the conditions of to-day.

Watson-Doyle's son says that the recovered documents will explode "a lot of myths about my father and Sherlock Holmes." They won't explode the gigantic myth of Holmes as something more than a mere figure in a book.

But I do want to know what was the significance of that parsley!

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