

The Complete Works of Sherlock Holmes

With an Introduction by Robert Ryan

by

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



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An Introduction by Robert Ryan

STEEL TRUE, BLADE STRAIGHT

Some time ago, at a fellow journalist's dinner party, my wife let slip that she had, at that point, never seen Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Jaws dropped. How could she have missed such a cornerstone of modern multimedia small-talk? But then one well-known glossy magazine editor leaned over and said 'You lucky thing. I would give anything to experience it for the first time again. I envy you your fresh eyes.' Wine, you understand, had been taken.

Yet I have to admit I feel something similar when I realize that a whole new generation of readers, perhaps drawn to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creations by recent screen adaptations, are about to experience Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson in print (albeit of a kind ACD might not recognize) for the first time.

For I, too, came to the Great Detective and his companion via the silver screen. In my case it was the Basil Rathbone/Nigel Bruce series for 20th Century Fox and Universal, fourteen films of varying quality that were made from 1939 to 1946, but which, by the time of my childhood, were often used as an emergency filler on Saturday afternoons in winter, when inclement weather played havoc with the sporting schedule on BBC's *Grandstand*. Creaky, black-and-white affairs, perhaps, but the eternal appeal of the pairing of super-sleuth Holmes with Watson, the trusty friend and associate, reached out and grabbed me from even the flimsiest of Hollywood backlots. I found myself hoping for pitch and course inspections of frostbitten ground so that the films might be dusted off once more.

Exactly when it was I made the transition to the printed page, I cannot be certain, but I am sure it was with *The Hound of The Baskervilles*, followed by the short story collection, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. It was then I realized that, although Rathbone's performance was, even in the weakest yarns, a recognizable simulacrum of Holmes, Bruce's bumbling creation, whilst lovable, bore scant resemblance to the reliable chronicler and companion that Conan Doyle created. It was not quite a travesty, but even at that early age it imbued in me a sense that Watson, thanks possibly to the buffoon-ish Bruce, was the undersung half of the partnership.

However, not every reader who has come to this compendium will be a debutante to the tales from 221b Baker Street or have been led here by TV or film. For some it will be a welcome reacquaintance for Conan Doyle rewards re-reading, for his mastery of plot, pace, character and, perhaps above all, the sort of dialogue that still raises hairs on necks.

'Mr Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!'

'You know my methods, Watson.'

'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth'

~~'It is, of course, a trifle, but there is nothing so important as trifles.'~~

'You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear.'

And, perhaps most thrillingly of all, in an urgent message to Watson: *'Am dining at Goldini's Restaurant, Gloucester Road, Kensington. Please come at once and join me there. Bring with you a jemmy, a dark lantern, a chisel, and a revolver. S. H.'*

Such comforting old friends are scattered like waymarkers throughout the various cases and finding one along the road is always a source of joy.

Without being in any way methodical, over the years I have probably read the entire Holmes canon several times, but, as with many readers, one mystery, above all, seemed to elude both me and any clear explanation from the author or the master detective himself. Who, exactly, is Dr John H Watson?

We need to ask this question because the novels and stories tell us very little. We aren't sure what the initial of his middle name stands for (it was Dorothy L Sayers who championed 'Hamish'); we aren't certain how his first (or was it second?) wife, Mary Morstan, died or even how many times he has been married. His first name is hardly mentioned (he is 'Watson' or 'Doctor Watson') and in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', watch out for his wife calling him 'James'. The paucity of information is because, as narrator of the vast bulk of the tales, the modest, faithful Watson shines the limelight on Holmes, the hero of the cases, not himself.

Consequently, we know much about the world's only consulting detective – his hobbies, methods, addictions, physical appearance, routines ('He had no breakfast for himself, for it was one of his peculiarities that in his more intense moments he would permit himself no food'), gaps in his knowledge (politics, astronomy), morals, opinions of women and human weakness in general.

We even know the man who was the model for Holmes – Joseph Bell (1837-1911), a brilliantly deductive surgeon who was Arthur Conan Doyle's mentor at medical school in Edinburgh. Robert Louis Stephenson wrote to Conan Doyle from Samoa: 'I hope you will allow me to offer you my compliments on your very ingenious and very interesting adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Only the one thing troubles me: can this be my old friend Joe Bell?'

Conan Doyle confirmed by return that Bell was indeed the inspiration for his detective.

But what do we really know of Watson? It might upset those who champion Rathbone, Brett, Downey Jr or Cumberbatch as the definitive portrayal of Holmes to recognize it, but there is a core similarity in all versions of Sherlock to date, no matter how the costumes, physiognomy or the date might change. This is because Sherlock Holmes' character is at once defined and constrained by a simple passage in 'A Scandal in Bohemia', when Watson observes: 'He was ... the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen.' And physically, the portrayals nearly always (exceptions for Downey Jr and the portly Arthur Wontner, who appeared as Holmes in five 1930s outings) follow the version depicted by artist Sidney Paget in *The Strand* magazine and Watson's description in *A Study in Scarlet*: 'In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing ... and his thin, hawk-

like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination.’

The personality, too, is as predictable as the physical: we nearly always have a detached, rational Holmes – except perhaps when Irene Adler enters the picture – the gifted outsider who cares little for social niceties and who exudes a sense of ‘otherness’, modishly expressed as some form of Asperger’s. Conan Doyle, in his autobiography, summed it up perfectly by saying that Holmes as a character: ‘... admits no light or shade. He is a calculating machine, and anything you add to that simply weakens the effect.’

Try to grasp the screen versions of Watson as firmly as Holmes and the man runs through your fingers like sand. Is he the faithful but farcical Nigel Bruce? The athletic Jude Law? The stolid Edward Hardwicke? The wily Ian Hart? The cuddly Martin Freeman? Watson, of course, can even switch sex and become Joan (Lucy Lui in *Elementary*) or Jane (Margaret Collins in a 1987 CBS telemovie), such is the mutability of this quintessential sidekick. Watson is the blueprint for every adventurer’s foil and chum, from Batman’s Robin, The Lone Ranger’s Tonto, Modesty’s Willie Garvin, Dr Who’s many companions, Nero Wolfe’s Archie to Morse’s Lewis. And the Prime Directive for every one of these, including Watson, always seems to be: ‘Never Upstage The Star’.

All this matters to me because, for my latest novel, I wanted to move Watson centre stage, out of Holmes’ lengthy shadow, to fly solo into the slaughter of the Western Front. And give him a murder solve.

I wrote a novel called *Early One Morning*, my fourth, although its conception pre-dated its predecessors. It was the first book I ever wanted to write, but it had a gestation of close to six years. I was inspired by a single line in a motor racing report in the *Guardian*, probably written by Richard Williams. It went something like: ‘... the course at Monaco has barely changed since an enigmatic Englishman called Williams – who later went on to become spy for Special Operations Executive in France – first won the race in 1929.’ And then it moved on.

I found myself unable to, mesmerized by this revelation. So there was a racing driver spy in WW2. Like Bill Crosby and Robert Culp’s Cold War tennis playing agents in *I Spy*? Yes, not only that, it goes better – told to recruit only men he trusted, Williams built a resistance circuit which consisted entirely of the great Grand Prix drivers of the age. It took so long to write because at the time SOE files were closed (which is why it became a novel) and fleshing out the story with solid research was a lengthy process.

Something similar happened with Watson. Staying in a hotel in the West Country, I chanced upon a dog-eared copy of Jack Tracey’s *Sherlockiana*, one of those obsessive and entertaining dissections of the world of Sherlock Holmes (see also Leslie S. Klinger’s epic *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes* which seemed to list, from A-Z, every location, character and plot device in Conan Doyle’s stories and novels. Starting, rather ambitiously at ‘A’ – for it was a long, wet afternoon in Cornwall – I came across the entry for the Army Medical Department’, which Watson had joined in 1878. Tracey noted: ‘Holmes remarked in 1914 that Watson was rejoining his old service.’

By 1914 and the outbreak of World War One, the AMD had become the Royal Army Medical Corp

and, unwittingly at that point, it was about to face some of the most terrible carnage and fearsome medical challenges the world had ever seen. So, according to Conan Doyle, Watson served in World War One? Intrigued, I revisited the short story – ‘His Last Bow’ – that contained that throwaway line. It is an atypical Holmes story (it is not narrated by Watson and is more espionage than detective tale), written by Conan Doyle during the war and intended as a morale boost for readers tiring of war by 1917. (By that time ACD still believed the war to be justifiable; perhaps his unshakeable belief in spiritualism helped.) It contains one of the most famous of Holmes’ speeches, later spoken by Basil Rathbone in a similarly jingoistic vein, albeit in a WW2 setting:

‘There’s an east wind coming, Watson.’

‘I think not, Holmes. It is very warm.’

‘Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There’s an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it’s God’s own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared.’

In the same story, we discover that Holmes has indulged his fascination for apiculture during his retirement on the Sussex Downs:

‘Exactly, Watson. Here is the fruit of my leisured ease, the magnum opus of my latter years.’ He picked up the volume from the table and read out the whole title, ‘Practical Handbook of Bee Culture with some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen.’ Alone I did it. Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days, when I watched the little working gangs as once I watched the criminal world of London.’

But of Watson’s future in the RAMC, we hear no more. Surely, I thought, of all the later non-ACD ‘continuations’ of Holmes that exist, from tracking down Jack the Ripper or fighting Fu Manchu to, finally, telling the tale of ‘The Singular Affair of the Aluminium Crutch’, someone must have taken Watson’s career and extended in it into 1914-18 when, perhaps, his medical skills might finally come to the fore. But no, there appeared to be precious little evidence of anyone bothering with Holmes’ Boswell and the Great War. Pity, I thought. I’d read that.

And so matters remained for several years, with me adding ‘Watson’s War’ to lists of possible projects, but never quite getting round to it. Then, in January 2011, I had a meeting with Maxine Hitchcock, editorial director of Simon & Schuster. She mentioned they were looking for a work of fiction featuring a ‘detective in the trenches’. I said it was an interesting idea – what better spot to commit murder than in a place where thousands are being slaughtered each day? But I also knew it had its problems, not least because the frontline was very fluid (soldiers did not spend weeks in the trenches – they were rotated back on a regular basis) and also most Military Policemen were concerned with desertion and perceived cowardice than crime. So I said: ‘Actually, it would be better if he wasn’t a copper, but a doctor, just behind the lines, a man who might recognize a murder when he sees one. And why not go one step further and make the central figure Dr Watson?’

I told her about *Sherlockiana* and ‘His Last Bow’ and how I had considered this before. Silence from Ms Hitchcock. ‘Silly idea?’ I asked. ‘No, not at all,’ she replied, deep in thought ...

And so we started on the road to *Dead Man's Land*, the story of the good doctor's adventures in World War One. But there was one fly in this petroleum jelly ointment, in that Dr Watson has been trademarked by the Conan Doyle Estate, along with Holmes, Moriarty and Professor Challenger (although the tales themselves are all technically out of copyright in this country). So it seemed worthwhile getting the Conan Doyle Estate's blessing. I contacted Olivia Guest at Jonathan Clowes Agency (which represents the ACD estate), who asked me to pitch the story (at that point rather sketchy) over the telephone. She liked the concept enough to take it to Andrea Plunket who rejoices in the title Administrator of the Conan Doyle Copyrights and Director of the EU Trademarks. After a few tense weeks I received a green light.

I then realized the enormity of what I had taken on. Not only did I have to research the minutiae of World War One, I had to master the often complex hierarchy of the medical services during the conflict, get up to speed on the treatment of war wounds, plus by daring to tackle such an iconic figure I risked enraging Holmes enthusiasts of all stripes, from long-established societies like the Baker Street Irregulars or the Sherlock Holmes Society of London to freshly minted aggregations of Cumberwatching fans such as the Baker Street Babes. And of course, although I was adamant Holmes wouldn't appear but obliquely and I wasn't interested in even attempting for the book to stand alongside the jealously guarded 'canon' of original stories and novels – it is not a pastiche of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – I wanted my Watson to inhabit Conan Doyle's timeline. Which means Dr Watson is not a young man. In fact, technically, he is too old to serve.

Even more pressing than that, I still had that other question to address: Who exactly IS Dr John H Watson?

Watson is, of course, Holmes' biographer. All but four of the adventures (fifty-six short stories and five novels) are narrated by him; two are by Holmes himself ('The Lion's Mane' and 'The Blanched Soldier') and two further in the third person ('The Mazarin Stone' and 'His Last Bow'). Therefore, most of what we know about him comes from Watson's own writings. But how reliable a narrator is he? Is Watson being totally honest when he says: 'If I have one quality upon earth it is common sense' ('The Hound of the Baskervilles')? or describes himself thus in 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man': 'If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance.' There is a strong whiff of self-deprecation here.

And what are we to make of this, from Holmes in 'The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier'? 'Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances.' Well, praise indeed. Followed rapidly by: 'A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.' Ouch.

Unreliable narrator and perhaps unreliable, or at least selective, biographer? We know that he has carefully chosen which Holmes mysteries to chronicle in detail, with some estimates saying the

published works represent about 5 per cent of the detective's cases over his working life. Were there great swathes of time when the detective's famous mental faculties were not fully engaged or spluttered fitfully? There are also tales Watson chose not to tell – 'The Giant Rat of Sumatra' ('a story for which the world is not yet prepared,' according to Holmes); 'The Arrest of Wilson, the Notorious Canary-Trainer' and 'The Repulsive Story of the Red Leech', among many others.

For the moment, though, let us stick to the facts. Most researchers give his date of birth as 7 April 1853 (with some citing a year earlier). In *A Study in Scarlet*, he tells us he has a medical degree from London, was on the staff at St Bartholomew's Hospital (later the site of the fateful first meeting with Holmes), joined the Army Medical Department before the Second Afghan War and was wounded at the Battle of Maiwand in July 1880 (although the exact nature of that wound or wounds seems to vary over the years) and invalided out of the AMD with a small pension. Modest enough, anyway, that he had to seek shared lodgings, which brought him to 221b Baker Street and Holmes and Mrs Hudson. There is evidence he was married at least twice, with Mary Morstan, whom he met in 1888, and who died in the early 1890s, possibly being his second wife (see 'The Five Orange Pips'). His subsequent marriages are hard to track, as are the various medical practices he procured – at Paddington, Kensington and Queen Anne Street.

In those times he kept a wife and a practice (and during The Great Hiatus, 1891-1894, when Holmes was presumed dead with Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls), Watson does not live with Holmes, who nevertheless, sometimes comes calling when adventure beckons. A possible third marriage is alluded to in 'The Blanched Soldier' for 1903, the last year of Holmes' active work as a consulting detective. From then on, until reunited with Holmes in 1914 for 'His Last Bow', he was presumably working as a GP in Queen Anne Street and their contacts were restricted to 'the occasional weekend' visit (mentioned in 'The Lion's Mane') and letters or telegrams from Watson asking permission to reveal the details of a distant case to a public eager for more of Sherlock Holmes.

So much for the biographical details. But what of Watson's appearance and character? Throughout the following pages you will discover that he is a middle-sized, strongly built man (if thin as a lath and brown as a nut after his war service), a former rugby player (for Blackheath) and a crack shot who is able to hold his own in a struggle. While not the equal of Holmes intellectually (who could hope to be?) he is a loyal, unswerving, supportive friend with admirable tenacity, a man who could be called upon without hesitation or even explanation ('Quickly, Watson, get your service revolver!'), who exhibits a 'pawky humour'.

It is, to be honest, a pretty thin portrait compared to what we come to know of Holmes and his various foibles and talents. But we do also come to appreciate that Watson does not share Holmes' disinterest in the opposite sex. There are the marriages, of course, and Holmes mentions Watson's 'natural advantages' with women (is this a way of saying he is handsome?) in 'The Retired Colourman' and in 'The Second Stain' says: 'Now, Watson, the fair sex is your department.' In a rare moment of boastfulness Watson claims in *The Sign of the Four* of possessing 'an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents'.

This latter gave me scope to have Watson as a man who likes, appreciates, listens to and (to some extent) understands the women who surround him at the Casualty Clearing Station where he works in my novel. Of course, I still had the problem of his age. Research quickly threw up examples of doctors in their 40s who had been turned down for service abroad. There was plenty of work for them to do in

the hospitals at home. But then I met Sue Light, whom I found through her blog *This Intrepid Band* (<http://greatwarnurses.blogspot.com>), a wonderful source of information about the medical services in World War One. She told me that some doctors, if they had a particular skill to impart, were enlisted at a reasonably advanced age in the RAMC at the rank of Captain or Major.

So in the novel *Watson*, an avid reader of the *British Medical Journal*, is intrigued by the new approaches to blood transfusion, using trisodium citrate as an anticoagulant, being pioneered by Argentinian, Belgian and Canadian doctors. A campaign of cajoling, badgering and string-pulling by Watson results in the RAMC bringing him onboard as a temporary major. After a few months of transfusion and blood grouping trials in Egypt with the Leigh Pals Battalion, Watson is charged with demonstrating and proselytizing about the new technique behind the lines in France and Belgium.

‘Don’t,’ warned Sue Light early on, ‘put a Voluntary Aid Detachment in a casualty Clearing Station. Everyone does it. Only QAs [Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps] served beyond the base hospitals.’

VADs were the nice ‘gals’ (think Vera Brittain in *Testament of Youth* or Sybil in *Downton Abbey*) who volunteered as auxiliary nursing staff and were often looked down upon by the professional nurses. Too late, I told her. I’d made up my mind. But she warned me that I had better have a very good reason why Watson’s very own sidekick, VAD Mrs Gregson, would be that far forward. So I have.

The plot came from a fascination with the Pals Battalions, those units raised as part of Kitchener’s New Army (‘Your Country Needs You’ – mainly because the previous army are pretty much all dead or maimed), which included whole companies of men from the same town and village and often streets – friends, relations, even enemies all thrown together into war.

The action of the book takes place to the south of Ypres in early 1916, over the course of ten days. Watson is demonstrating his blood transfusion technique at a CCS. When one of his patients dies, Watson is certain it wasn’t due to any problem with the blood or the new methodology. When a VAD admits to having seen the dead man’s symptoms on a previous victim from the same battalion, he becomes certain of it. This is murder. But, with the terrible waste of life going on a few miles away, who is going to worry about a couple of extra dead soldiers? Well, Dr Watson is. And, although he is not himself a great detective, he has been around one for long enough. And he knows his methods, after all ...

One problem remained. How much of Conan Doyle’s originals to allude to? It would be very easy to overwhelm the novel with enough sly winks and in-jokes to keep the most gimlet-eyed Sherlockian happy. Then again, Watson is an older man, who, in the midst of so much suffering, is bound to reminisce about the better, simpler times at 221b Baker Street. And when confronted with murder and a profusion of clues, he would be bound to ask himself one question: What would Sherlock do?

I have to confess I had to conjure a mental image of Watson to picture him in action while writing *Dead Man’s Land*. But which Watson to choose? Not poor Nigel Bruce. Would you trust him with your gassed and your wounded? Jude Law is too young, too pretty. I love the Freeman/Cumberbatch double act, but have never really bought into Freeman as an army man; I couldn’t picture him at the front. For me, the closest approximation to the World War One version was Jeremy Brett’s first foil,

David Burke, who seemed to combine a certain doggedness with a spark all of his own. Not a perfect fit, but close enough for my Watson.

So if Burke was mine, who was Conan Doyle's inspiration for Dr John H Watson? Well, if Holmes is Joseph Bell, Watson is the man who served as his assistant for a short while, and who witnessed firsthand the man's capacity for observation and deduction from the flimsiest of clues. Look at Sidne Paget's drawing, then at photographs of a younger Arthur Conan Doyle. Think of Watson's character traits, his kindness, compassion, dependability, thoughtfulness, solid workaday thoroughness, all the hallmarks of a good General Practitioner. And Conan Doyle was a GP (in Plymouth and Southsea) before he took up writing full time. In his highly readable book *On Conan Doyle*, Michael Dirda quotes a lecture by ACD called 'The Romance of Medicine'. Conan Doyle says: 'The moral training keep a confidence inviolate, to act promptly on a sudden call, to keep your head in critical moments, to be kind yet strong – where can you, outside medicine, get such a training as that?' Apart, that is, from being the partner of the finest criminal investigator of all time.

Watson played rugby; Conan Doyle was a very useful goalkeeper and batsman. And he was married twice. Conan Doyle once claimed 'unaffectedness' as one of his prime virtues. Who is more unaffected than Watson, hiding his own light under a bushel while Holmes soaks up the glory? Yes, Watson is Conan Doyle, with the distance between real author and fictional biographer reduced to a wafer thin gap. And the great detective's marvellous companion can have no better epitaph than the one etched on his creator's own tombstone: Steel True, Blade Straight. That's Dr Watson.

And now, you have before you Conan Doyle's complete Sherlock Holmes stories, one of the greatest, most entertaining bodies of work in the English language, featuring a brace of characters who have a secure place in the pantheon of literature's immortals. To quote a phrase: the game's afoot. Enjoy every moment of it. I have.

Robert Ryan

Robert Ryan's novel about Watson's war in the RAMC, Dead Man's Land, is published in January 2013 by Simon & Schuster.

A STUDY IN SCARLET

PART I.

(Being a reprint from the reminiscences of JOHN H. WATSON, M.D., late of the Army Medical Department.)

CHAPTER I. 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 Peshawar. 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 verandah, 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 sending me back to England. I was dispatched, accordingly, in the troopship 'Orontes,' and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.

I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air--or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances, I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably more freely than I ought. So alarming did the state of my finances become, that I soon realized that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel,

and to take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile.

On the very day that I had come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Criterion Bar, when someone tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I recognized young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Barts. The sight of a friendly face in the great wilderness of London is a pleasant thing indeed to a lonely man. In old days Stamford had never been a particular crony of mine, but now I hailed him with enthusiasm, and he, in his turn, appeared to be delighted to see me. In the exuberance of my joy, I asked him to lunch with me at the Holborn, and we started off together in a hansom.

‘Whatever have you been doing with yourself, Watson?’ he asked in undisguised wonder, as we rattled through the crowded London streets. ‘You are as thin as a lath and as brown as a nut.’

I gave him a short sketch of my adventures, and had hardly concluded it by the time that we reached our destination.

‘Poor devil!’ he said, commiseratingly, after he had listened to my misfortunes. ‘What are you up to now?’

‘Looking for lodgings.’ [3] I answered. ‘Trying to solve the problem as to whether it is possible to get comfortable rooms at a reasonable price.’

‘That’s a strange thing,’ remarked my companion; ‘you are the second man to-day that has used the expression to me.’

‘And who was the first?’ I asked.

‘A fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital. He was bemoaning himself this morning because he could not get someone to go halves with him in some nice rooms which he had found, and which were too much for his purse.’

‘By Jove!’ I cried, ‘if he really wants someone to share the rooms and the expense, I am the very man for him. I should prefer having a partner to being alone.’

Young Stamford looked rather strangely at me over his wine-glass. ‘You don’t know Sherlock Holmes yet,’ he said; ‘perhaps you would not care for him as a constant companion.’

‘Why, what is there against him?’

‘Oh, I didn’t say there was anything against him. He is a little queer in his ideas--an enthusiast in some branches of science. As far as I know he is a decent fellow enough.’

‘A medical student, I suppose?’ said I.

‘No--I have no idea what he intends to go in for. I believe he is well up in anatomy, and he is a first class chemist; but, as far as I know, he has never taken out any systematic medical classes. His studies are very desultory and eccentric, but he has amassed a lot of out-of-the-way knowledge which would astonish his professors.’

‘Did you never ask him what he was going in for?’ I asked.

‘No; he is not a man that it is easy to draw out, though he can be communicative enough when the fancy seizes him.’

‘I should like to meet him,’ I said. ‘If I am to lodge with anyone, I should prefer a man of studious and quiet habits. I am not strong enough yet to stand much noise or excitement. I had enough of both in Afghanistan to last me for the remainder of my natural existence. How could I meet this friend of yours?’

‘He is sure to be at the laboratory,’ returned my companion. ‘He either avoids the place for weeks, or else he works there from morning to night. If you like, we shall drive round together after luncheon.’

‘Certainly,’ I answered, and the conversation drifted away into other channels.

As we made our way to the hospital after leaving the Holborn, Stamford gave me a few more particulars about the gentleman whom I proposed to take as a fellow-lodger.

‘You mustn’t blame me if you don’t get on with him,’ he said; ‘I know nothing more of him than I have learned from meeting him occasionally in the laboratory. You proposed this arrangement, so you must not hold me responsible.’

‘If we don’t get on it will be easy to part company,’ I answered. ‘It seems to me, Stamford,’ I added, looking hard at my companion, ‘that you have some reason for washing your hands of the matter. Is this fellow’s temper so formidable, or what is it? Don’t be mealy-mouthed about it.’

‘It is not easy to express the inexpressible,’ he answered with a laugh. ‘Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes--it approaches to cold-bloodedness. I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness. He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge.’

‘Very right too.’

‘Yes, but it may be pushed to excess. When it comes to beating the subjects in the dissecting-room with a stick, it is certainly taking rather a bizarre shape.’

‘Beating the subjects!’

‘Yes, to verify how far bruises may be produced after death. I saw him at it with my own eyes.’

‘And yet you say he is not a medical student?’

‘No. Heaven knows what the objects of his studies are. But here we are, and you must form your own impressions about him.’ As he spoke, we turned down a narrow lane and passed through a small side-door, which opened into a wing of the great hospital. It was familiar ground to me, and I needed no guiding as we ascended the bleak stone staircase and made our way down the long corridor with its vista of whitewashed wall and dun-coloured doors. Near the further end a low arched passage branched away from it and led to the chemical laboratory.

This was a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps, with their blue flickering flames. There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work. At the sound of our steps he glanced round and sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure. ‘I’ve found it! I’ve found it,’ he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. ‘I have found a re-agent which is precipitated by hoemoglobin, [4] and by nothing else.’ Had he discovered a gold mine, greater delight could not have shone upon his features.

‘Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,’ said Stamford, introducing us.

‘How are you?’ he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should hardly have given him credit. ‘You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.’

‘How on earth did you know that?’ I asked in astonishment.

‘Never mind,’ said he, chuckling to himself. ‘The question now is about hoemoglobin. No doubt you see the significance of this discovery of mine?’

‘It is interesting, chemically, no doubt,’ I answered, ‘but practically----’

‘Why, man, it is the most practical medico-legal discovery for years. Don’t you see that it gives us an infallible test for blood stains. Come over here now!’ He seized me by the coat-sleeve in his eagerness, and drew me over to the table at which he had been working. ‘Let us have some fresh blood,’ he said, digging a long bodkin into his finger, and drawing off the resulting drop of blood in a chemical pipette. ‘Now, I add this small quantity of blood to a litre of water. You perceive that the resulting mixture has the appearance of pure water. The proportion of blood cannot be more than one in a million. I have no doubt, however, that we shall be able to obtain the characteristic reaction.’ As he spoke, he threw into the vessel a few white crystals, and then added some drops of a transparent fluid. In an instant the contents assumed a dull mahogany colour, and a brownish dust was precipitated

to the bottom of the glass jar.

‘Ha! ha!’ he cried, clapping his hands, and looking as delighted as a child with a new toy. ‘What do you think of that?’

‘It seems to be a very delicate test,’ I remarked.

‘Beautiful! Beautiful! The old Guaiacum test was very clumsy and uncertain. So is the microscopic examination for blood corpuscles. The latter is valueless if the stains are a few hours old. Now, this appears to act as well whether the blood is old or new. Had this test been invented, there are hundreds of men now walking the earth who would long ago have paid the penalty of their crimes.’

‘Indeed!’ I murmured.

‘Criminal cases are continually hinging upon that one point. A man is suspected of a crime months perhaps after it has been committed. His linen or clothes are examined, and brownish stains discovered upon them. Are they blood stains, or mud stains, or rust stains, or fruit stains, or what are they? That is a question which has puzzled many an expert, and why? Because there was no reliable test. Now we have the Sherlock Holmes’ test, and there will no longer be any difficulty.’

His eyes fairly glittered as he spoke, and he put his hand over his heart and bowed as if to some applauding crowd conjured up by his imagination.

‘You are to be congratulated,’ I remarked, considerably surprised at his enthusiasm.

‘There was the case of Von Bischoff at Frankfort last year. He would certainly have been hung had this test been in existence. Then there was Mason of Bradford, and the notorious Muller, and Lefevre of Montpellier, and Samson of new Orleans. I could name a score of cases in which it would have been decisive.’

‘You seem to be a walking calendar of crime,’ said Stamford with a laugh. ‘You might start a paper on those lines. Call it the ‘Police News of the Past.’‘

‘Very interesting reading it might be made, too,’ remarked Sherlock Holmes, sticking a small piece of plaster over the prick on his finger. ‘I have to be careful,’ he continued, turning to me with a smile ‘for I dabble with poisons a good deal.’ He held out his hand as he spoke, and I noticed that it was all mottled over with similar pieces of plaster, and discoloured with strong acids.

‘We came here on business,’ said Stamford, sitting down on a high three-legged stool, and pushing another one in my direction with his foot. ‘My friend here wants to take diggings, and as you were complaining that you could get no one to go halves with you, I thought that I had better bring you together.’

Sherlock Holmes seemed delighted at the idea of sharing his rooms with me. ‘I have my eye on a suite in Baker Street,’ he said, ‘which would suit us down to the ground. You don’t mind the smell of strong tobacco, I hope?’

‘I always smoke ‘ship’s’ myself,’ I answered.

‘That’s good enough. I generally have chemicals about, and occasionally do experiments. Would that annoy you?’

‘By no means.’

‘Let me see--what are my other shortcomings. I get in the dumps at times, and don’t open my mouth for days on end. You must not think I am sulky when I do that. Just let me alone, and I’ll soon be right. What have you to confess now? It’s just as well for two fellows to know the worst of one another before they begin to live together.’

I laughed at this cross-examination. ‘I keep a bull pup,’ I said, ‘and I object to rows because my nerves are shaken, and I get up at all sorts of ungodly hours, and I am extremely lazy. I have another set of vices when I’m well, but those are the principal ones at present.’

‘Do you include violin-playing in your category of rows?’ he asked, anxiously.

‘It depends on the player,’ I answered. ‘A well-played violin is a treat for the gods--a badly-played

one----'

'Oh, that's all right,' he cried, with a merry laugh. 'I think we may consider the thing as settled--that is, if the rooms are agreeable to you.'

'When shall we see them?'

'Call for me here at noon to-morrow, and we'll go together and settle everything,' he answered.

'All right--noon exactly,' said I, shaking his hand.

We left him working among his chemicals, and we walked together towards my hotel.

'By the way,' I asked suddenly, stopping and turning upon Stamford, 'how the deuce did he know that I had come from Afghanistan?'

My companion smiled an enigmatical smile. 'That's just his little peculiarity,' he said. 'A good many people have wanted to know how he finds things out.'

'Oh! a mystery is it?' I cried, rubbing my hands. 'This is very piquant. I am much obliged to you for bringing us together. 'The proper study of mankind is man,' you know.'

'You must study him, then,' Stamford said, as he bade me good-bye. 'You'll find him a knotty problem, though. I'll wager he learns more about you than you about him. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' I answered, and strolled on to my hotel, considerably interested in my new acquaintance.

CHAPTER II. THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION.

WE met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, [5] Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting. They consisted of a couple of comfortable bed-rooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Sherlock Holmes followed me with several boxes and portmanteaus. For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.

Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting-rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the City. Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.

As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as to his aims in life, gradually deepened and increased. His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his

fragile philosophical instruments.

The reader may set me down as a hopeless busybody, when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavoured to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself. Before pronouncing judgment, however, be it remembered, how objectless was my life, and how little there was to engage my attention. My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial, and I had no friends who would call upon me and break the monotony of my daily existence. Under these circumstances, I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavouring to unravel it.

He was not studying medicine. He had himself, in reply to a question, confirmed Stamford's opinion upon that point. Neither did he appear to have pursued any course of reading which might fit him for a degree in science or any other recognized portal which would give him an entrance into the learned world. Yet his zeal for certain studies was remarkable, and within eccentric limits his knowledge was so extraordinarily ample and minute that his observations have fairly astounded me. Surely no man would work so hard or attain such precise information unless he had some definite end in view. Desultory readers are seldom remarkable for the exactness of their learning. No man burdens his mind with small matters unless he has some very good reason for doing so.

His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. Upon my quoting Thomas Carlyle, he inquired in the naivest way who he might be and what he had done. My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System. That any civilized human being in this nineteenth century should not be aware that the earth travelled round the sun appeared to be to me such an extraordinary fact that I could hardly realize it.

'You appear to be astonished,' he said, smiling at my expression of surprise. 'Now that I do know I shall do my best to forget it.'

'To forget it!'

'You see,' he explained, 'I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.'

'But the Solar System!' I protested.

'What the deuce is it to me?' he interrupted impatiently; 'you say that we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me or to my work.'

I was on the point of asking him what that work might be, but something in his manner showed me that the question would be an unwelcome one. I pondered over our short conversation, however, and endeavoured to draw my deductions from it. He said that he would acquire no knowledge which did not bear upon his object. Therefore all the knowledge which he possessed was such as would be useful to him. I enumerated in my own mind all the various points upon which he had shown me that he was exceptionally well-informed. I even took a pencil and jotted them down. I could not help smiling at the document when I had completed it. It ran in this way--

SHERLOCK HOLMES – his limits.

1. Knowledge of Literature.--Nil. 2. Philosophy.--Nil. 3. Astronomy.--Nil. 4. Politics.--Feeble. 5.

Botany.--Variable. Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening. 6. Geology.--Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them. 7. Chemistry.--Profound. 8. Anatomy.--Accurate, but unsystematic. 9. Sensational Literature.--Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century. 10. Plays the violin well. 11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman. 12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law. When I had got so far in my list I threw it into the fire in despair. 'If I can only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments, and discovering a calling which needs them all,' I said to myself, 'I may as well give up the attempt at once.'

I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn's Lieder, and other favourites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognized air. Leaning back in his arm-chair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy was more than I could determine. I might have rebelled against these exasperating solos had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favourite airs as a slight compensation for the trial upon my patience.

During the first week or so we had no callers, and I had begun to think that my companion was as friendless a man as I was myself. Presently, however, I found that he had many acquaintances, and those in the most different classes of society. There was one little sallow rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow who was introduced to me as Mr. Lestrade, and who came three or four times in a single week. One morning a young girl called, fashionably dressed, and stayed for half an hour or more. The same afternoon brought a grey-headed, seedy visitor, looking like a Jew pedlar, who appeared to me to be much excited, and who was closely followed by a slip-shod elderly woman. On another occasion an old white-haired gentleman had an interview with my companion; and on another a railway porter in his velveteen uniform. When any of these nondescript individuals put in an appearance, Sherlock Holmes used to beg for the use of the sitting-room, and I would retire to my bed-room. He always apologized to me for putting me to this inconvenience. 'I have to use this room as a place of business,' he said, 'and these people are my clients.' Again I had an opportunity of asking him a point blank question, and again my delicacy prevented me from forcing another man to confide in me. I imagined at the time that he had some strong reason for not alluding to it, but he soon dispelled the idea by coming round to the subject of his own accord.

It was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast. The landlady had become so accustomed to my late habits that my place had not been laid nor my coffee prepared. With the unreasonable petulance of mankind I rang the bell and gave a curt intimation that I was ready. Then I picked up a magazine from the table and attempted to while away the time with it, while my companion munched silently at his toast. One of the articles had a pencil mark at the heading, and I naturally began to run my eye through it.

Its somewhat ambitious title was 'The Book of Life,' and it attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way. It struck me as being a remarkable mixture of shrewdness and of absurdity. The reasoning was close and intense, but the deductions appeared to me to be far-fetched and exaggerated. The writer claimed by

momentary expression, a twitch of a muscle or a glance of an eye, to fathom a man's inmost thoughts. Deceit, according to him, was an impossibility in the case of one trained to observation and analysis. His conclusions were as infallible as so many propositions of Euclid. So startling would his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the processes by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him as a necromancer.

'From a drop of water,' said the writer, 'a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. Let him, on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation, and teaches one where to look and what to look for. By a man's finger nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt cuffs--by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent enquirer in any case is almost inconceivable.'

'What ineffable twaddle!' I cried, slapping the magazine down on the table, 'I never read such rubbish in my life.'

'What is it?' asked Sherlock Holmes.

'Why, this article,' I said, pointing at it with my egg spoon as I sat down to my breakfast. 'I see that you have read it since you have marked it. I don't deny that it is smartly written. It irritates me though. It is evidently the theory of some arm-chair loungee who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study. It is not practical. I should like to see him clapped down in a third class carriage on the Underground, and asked to give the trades of all his fellow-travellers. I would lay a thousand to one against him.'

'You would lose your money,' Sherlock Holmes remarked calmly. 'As for the article I wrote it myself.'

'You!'

'Yes, I have a turn both for observation and for deduction. The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical are really extremely practical--so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese.'

'And how?' I asked involuntarily.

'Well, I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight. There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can't unravel the thousand and first. Lestrade is a well-known detective. He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was what brought him here.'

'And these other people?'

'They are mostly sent on by private inquiry agencies. They are all people who are in trouble about something, and want a little enlightening. I listen to their story, they listen to my comments, and then I pocket my fee.'

'But do you mean to say,' I said, 'that without leaving your room you can unravel some knot which

other men can make nothing of, although they have seen every detail for themselves?’

‘Quite so. I have a kind of intuition that way. Now and again a case turns up which is a little more complex. Then I have to bustle about and see things with my own eyes. You see I have a lot of special knowledge which I apply to the problem, and which facilitates matters wonderfully. Those rules of deduction laid down in that article which aroused your scorn, are invaluable to me in practical work. Observation with me is second nature. You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan.’

‘You were told, no doubt.’

‘Nothing of the sort. I knew you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, ‘Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.’ The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished.’

‘It is simple enough as you explain it,’ I said, smiling. ‘You remind me of Edgar Allen Poe’s Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories.’

Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. ‘No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin,’ he observed. ‘Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends’ thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour’s silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.’

‘Have you read Gaboriau’s works?’ I asked. ‘Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?’

Sherlock Holmes sniffed sardonically. ‘Lecoq was a miserable bungler,’ he said, in an angry voice ‘he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty-four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid.’

I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style. I walked over to the window, and stood looking out into the busy street. ‘This fellow may be very clever,’ I said to myself, ‘but he is certainly very conceited.’

‘There are no crimes and no criminals in these days,’ he said, querulously. ‘What is the use of having brains in our profession. I know well that I have it in me to make my name famous. No man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done. And what is the result? There is no crime to detect, or, at most, some bungling villany with a motive so transparent that even a Scotland Yard official can see through it.’

I was still annoyed at his bumptious style of conversation. I thought it best to change the topic.

‘I wonder what that fellow is looking for?’ I asked, pointing to a stalwart, plainly-dressed individual who was walking slowly down the other side of the street, looking anxiously at the numbers. He had a large blue envelope in his hand, and was evidently the bearer of a message.

‘You mean the retired sergeant of Marines,’ said Sherlock Holmes.

‘Brag and bounce!’ thought I to myself. ‘He knows that I cannot verify his guess.’

The thought had hardly passed through my mind when the man whom we were watching caught sight of the number on our door, and ran rapidly across the roadway. We heard a loud knock, a deep voice below, and heavy steps ascending the stair.

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