

THE COMPLETE
SHERLOCK HOLMES,
VOLUME I

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

*With an Introduction and Notes
by Kyle Freeman*

George Stade
Consulting Editorial Director



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS
NEW YORK

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FROM THE PAGES OF *THE COMPLETE SHERLOCK HOLMES*, VOLUME I

“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 inquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems.” (*A Study in Scarlet*, page 17)

“It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment.” (*A Study in Scarlet*, page 22)

“When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth.” (*The Sign of Four*, page 126)

“It is the unofficial force—the Baker Street irregulars.”
(*The Sign of Four*, page 145)

“Singularity is almost invariably a clue. The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult it is to bring it home.”
(“The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” page 240)

He flicked the horse with his whip, and we dashed away through the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets, which widened gradually, until we were flying across a broad balustraded bridge with the murky river flowing sluggishly beneath us. Beyond lay another dull wilderness of bricks and mortar, its silence broken only by the heavy, regular footfall of the policeman, or the songs and shouts of some belated party of revellers. A dull wrack was drifting slowly across the sky, and a star or two twinkled dimly here and there through the rifts of the clouds. Holmes drove in silence, with his head sunk upon his breast, and the air of a man who is lost in thought. (“The Man with the Twisted Lip,” page 270)

“My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don’t know.” (“The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” page 302)

“Crime is common. Logic is rare.”

("The Adventure of the Copper Beeches," page 377)

Like all Holmes's reasoning the thing seemed simplicity itself when it was once explained. ("The Stock-Broker's Clerk," page 433)

"Elementary," said he. ("The Crooked Man," page 492)

Through the haze I had a vague vision of Holmes in his dressing-gown coiled up in an armchair with his black clay pipe between his lips.

(*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, page 592)

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A Study in Scarlet was first published in 1887, *The Sign of Four* in 1890, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in 1902. The stories in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* were first collected and published in 1891, and those in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* in 1892.

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SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Arthur Conan Doyle had many careers—physician, writer of popular fiction and nonfiction, war correspondent, historian, and spiritualist—but it was the creation of his immensely popular Sherlock Holmes that was to be his enduring legacy. The author was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on May 22, 1859. His mother raised ten children on her husband's small income; his father's poor health and heavy drinking made that a daunting task. Despite this adversity, his mother's willfulness and his exhaustive genealogical research instilled in Arthur a decided sense of purpose.

After early education in Jesuit schools, Conan Doyle enrolled in Edinburgh University, where he earned a medical degree while working part-time to support his family. At the university one of his instructors was Dr. Joseph Bell, who had an uncanny ability to deduce the histories of his patients and who later became a template for Sherlock Holmes. Another teacher, an eccentric Professor Rutherford, inspired the character of Professor George Edward Challenger in *The Lost World* and other novels and short stories.

Having had a taste of adventure when he served as ship's physician on a Greenland Sea whaler while still a student, Conan Doyle longed to travel after graduation and so took a position as doctor on a ship en route to West Africa. Returning to England, he set up as a physician in 1882. His practice was small at first, so he had time to do some writing. In 1887 the first Sherlock Holmes story appeared, titled *Study in Scarlet*. Over the next few years, Conan Doyle would write a historical novel, open a neurological practice, explore spiritualism, and send Holmes on further thrilling exploits. A second novel, *The Sign of Four*, came out in 1890, and starting in 1891 the Holmes stories regularly appeared in the *Strand Magazine*. Two collections, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in 1892 and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* in 1893, collected a total of twenty-four of the mysteries. However, Conan Doyle felt that work on the Holmes stories was keeping him from writing on more serious historical topics. To the shock of his readers, in the 1893 story called "The Final Problem" he described the death of his famous sleuth.

In 1894 Conan Doyle published *Round the Red Lamp*, a collection of short stories with a medical theme; in 1895 *The Stark Munro Letters*, an autobiographical novel; and in 1896 *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard*, set in the Napoleonic Wars. In 1900 he traveled to South Africa in the capacity of a war-time physician in Cape Town; his treatise on the Boer War earned him a knighthood in 1902. The same year Conan Doyle published *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, set before the story that had finished Holmes off in 1893. In 1903 new Holmes stories started to appear in the *Strand*.

In the coming years, Conan Doyle produced more popular books on a variety of subjects, including three new collections of stories—*The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905), *His Last Bow* (1917), and *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927)—plus a final Holmes novel, *The Valley of Fear* (1915). Among many other non-Holmes projects were the three Challenger novels, historical fiction and nonfiction, and several books on spiritualism. He also championed the rights of the wrongly accused in two separate cases exonerating innocent men.

With the onset of World War I, Conan Doyle served as a war correspondent on several major European battlefields. Following the war, he became a passionate advocate of spiritualism, which he embraced in part to communicate with his eldest son, Kingsley, who had died from influenza aggravated by war wounds. From 1920 until his death, the author wrote, traveled, and lectured

promote his belief in a spiritual life after the death of the body. After a long, demanding journey through Scandinavia, Arthur Conan Doyle suffered a heart attack; he died a few months later, on July 7, 1930, in Sussex.

THE WORLD OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE AND *SHERLOCK HOLMES*

- 1859** Arthur Conan Doyle is born on May 22 in Edinburgh, Scotland, the second child and eldest son of ten children that will be born to Charles and Mary Foley Doyle. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* are published.
- 1868** Arthur attends school with the Jesuits in England; later he will reject Catholicism.
- 1871** Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* is published. The first book of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is published. Royal Albert Hall, one of Britain's most important concert venues, opens in London.
- 1876** Conan Doyle enrolls in the University of Edinburgh Medical School. As a student, he takes various jobs to help his family, including serving as a ship's doctor on an Arctic voyage. While at Edinburgh, he meets Dr. Joseph Bell, whose analytical capabilities amaze his patients and students; Bell later becomes a model for Sherlock Holmes.
- 1879** "The Mystery of Sasassa Valley," Conan Doyle's first story, is published in *Chambers's Journal*, an Edinburgh weekly.
- 1881** Conan Doyle receives his Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery qualifications, and takes a position as ship's doctor on a steamer en route to West Africa.
- 1882** He returns to Great Britain and establishes his medical practice.
- 1885** Conan Doyle receives his M.D. degree. He marries Louise Hawkins; her poor health makes the marriage a difficult one.
- 1887** *A Study in Scarlet*, the debut Sherlock Holmes story, is published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*.
- 1889** Conan Doyle's short novel *The Mystery of Cloomber*, which is concerned with the paranormal, is published, as is *Micah Clarke*, a popular novel about the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685.
- 1890** The second Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four* is published, in February in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* and in October as a book. The story had been commissioned at the same dinner party at which Oscar Wilde was offered a contract for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, also published in *Lippincott's* this year.
- 1891** *The White Company*, a tale of fourteenth-century chivalry, is published. Conan Doyle closes his medical practice to devote more time to his writing career. Stories featuring Sherlock Holmes begin to appear regularly in the *Strand Magazine*.

1892 The story collection *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* is published.

1893 The year proves stressful, as the author's father dies and his wife is diagnosed with tuberculosis. Hoping to help Louise's condition, the family travels to Switzerland, where Conan Doyle visits Reichenbach Falls, the site he chooses for the death of Sherlock Holmes in "The Final Problem"; he intends for this to be the last Holmes story so that he can turn to literary work he considers more important. He joins the British Society for Psychical Research. The story collection *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* is published.

1894 *Round the Red Lamp*, a collection of medical short stories, is published. Conan Doyle makes a three-month speaking tour of the United States (with one stop in Toronto), traveling in the east as far south as Washington D.C., and in the Middle West as far as Chicago; it was his first personal discovery of America.

1895 *The Stark Munro Letters*, a fictionalized autobiography, is published.

1896 *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard*, about a hero in the Napoleonic Wars, is published.

1897 Conan Doyle meets Jean Leckie and falls in love with her; the two maintain a platonic relationship until their marriage in 1907. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is published.

1900 Conan Doyle travels to South Africa to serve as a hospital doctor in the Boer War; he publishes *The Great Boer War*, an account of that conflict. Oscar Wilde dies.

1901 Queen Victoria dies.

1902 *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a Holmes novel set before "The Final Problem" (1893), is published. Conan Doyle's work in a field hospital and his treatise on the Boer War, *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*, earn him a knighthood.

1903 New Holmes stories begin to appear in the *Strand Magazine*.

1905 The story collection *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* is published.

1906 Louise dies of tuberculosis at age forty-nine. Conan Doyle begins investigations that will exonerate George Edalji, a man who had been wrongfully accused and sent to jail. *Sir Nigel*, a companion piece to *The White Company* (1891), is published.

1907 Conan Doyle marries Jean Leckie. *Through the Magic Door*, about the importance of books in his life, is published.

1909 *The Crime of the Congo*, about Belgian atrocities in the Congo, is published.

1910 Conan Doyle investigates the case of Oscar Slater, another wrongfully accused man. E. M. Forster's *Howards End* is published.

1912 *The Lost World* is published; the first of a series of science fiction novels featuring the skeptical Professor George Edward Challenger, it is the best known of the author's non-Holmes stories.

- 1913** The second Challenger novel, *The Poison Belt*, is published.
-
- 1914** Conan Doyle visits New York City and Canada. World War I begins. James Joyce's *Dubliners* is published.
- 1915** The final Holmes novel, *The Valley of Fear*, is published.
- Conan Doyle announces his belief in spiritualism, which holds that the spirit has a life after the death of the body; he will become one of its best-known advocates. James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is published.
- 1916**
- 1917** The Holmes story collection *His Last Bow* is published.
- The author's eldest son, Kingsley, dies from war wounds and in fluenza. World War I ends.
- 1918** Conan Doyle publishes *The New Revelation*, his first book on spiritualism. Gerard Manley Hopkins's *Poems* is published.
- 1919** Conan Doyle's brother, Innes, dies from pneumonia. Another book on spiritualism, *The Vital Message*, is published.
- 1920** From this year until his death, the author acts as an advocate for spiritualism.
- 1921** Conan Doyle's mother, Mary, dies. Jean experiments with automatic writing.
- 1922** Conan Doyle tours America in support of spiritualism. T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* are published.
- 1924** Conan Doyle's autobiography, *Memories and Adventures*, is published.
- 1926** The last Challenger novel, *The Land of Mist*, is published, as is Conan Doyle's two-volume *History of Spiritualism*.
- 1927** The final Holmes story collection, *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*, is published. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is published.
- 1930** Sir Arthur Conan Doyle dies on July 7 at his home in Sussex from an illness resulting from a heart attack.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle lived an interesting life by any standard. As a young ship's surgeon he sailed the Arctic in a whaling ship, and later he steamed down the west coast of Africa on a cargo vessel. In midlife his fame as a writer opened doors all over the world. He showed some finer points of golf to Rudyard Kipling in a Vermont field, and argued in the newspapers with his neighbor, Bernard Shaw, about the *Titanic*. He climbed the top of the Great Pyramid in Giza, and lectured the deacons in the Great Mormon Tabernacle in Utah. As a champion of spiritualism he proclaimed that a pharaoh's curse could indeed have caused the death of Lord Carnarvon, the patron of the Tutankhamun expedition, and assured the public that Agatha Christie, who had mysteriously disappeared, would show up safe and sound because a psychic to whom he had taken one of her gloves predicted it. He was knighted by King Edward VII for writing a pamphlet justifying the British cause in the Boer War. He wrote what he thought were important historical novels in the manner of Sir Walter Scott and through them hoped to establish his legacy. Ironically enough, all these events have a chance to be remembered only because he also created what he regarded as "a lower stratum of literary achievement," his peerless detective, Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes has become as famous as any character in literature. His name is synonymous with brilliant deduction. Call someone "Sherlock" and everyone knows what you mean. The stories have been in print continuously since the time the first one, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in 1887. In addition, Holmes has been the leading character in hundreds of plays, films, and television shows. He made his debut in films even before Conan Doyle had finished writing the stories. Long before Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce created their memorable roles of Holmes and Watson in films of the late 1930s and the 1940s, the celebrated sleuth had already been played by a host of actors on stage and screen. The stories continue to be filmed today. You have probably seen one of the excellent Granada Television episodes with Jeremy Brett, which may well be the reason you are reading this book.

Sherlock Holmes has such a strong hold on the popular imagination that he is no longer moored to the books in which he first appeared. Not satisfied by the fifty-six short stories and four novellas of the Holmes canon, writers first adopted the character by completing cases Dr. Watson had mentioned only in passing. Soon they constructed new episodes for the master detective. Film directors followed suit. Though many films have been scrupulously true to the plots of the stories, some have created their own plots. Such films include *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985), which invented a childhood for the detective. In it Holmes and Watson meet as teenagers at a boarding school where Professor Moriarty, Holmes's great nemesis in the books, is an encouraging teacher. It also introduces a love interest for Holmes, a young girl whose death at the hands of Moriarty, who turns into a deadly foe, explains why Holmes was never the marrying kind. *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1976) sends Holmes to Vienna to meet Sigmund Freud, who traces Holmes's obsession with Moriarty to a repressed memory of his mother in the arms of the professor. In perhaps the boldest reimagining of the stories, and certainly the most amusing, *Without a Clue* (1988) reveals that Watson was the real detective genius and that Holmes was his fictional creation; when the public clamored to meet Holmes, Watson hired a dim-witted actor to play the role.

So powerful is the Holmes persona that even tangential connections attract viewers. In 2000 and 2002 the Public Broadcasting System aired a joint British-American series of mysteries that featured

Conan Doyle and his teacher, Dr. Joseph Bell, on whom Holmes was partly modeled, as characters solving crimes in the manner of Holmes and Watson. Called *Murder Rooms: The Dark Beginnings of Sherlock Holmes*, the episodes weave incidents from Conan Doyle's life into fictional plots that foreshadow the great stories to come. But clearly the draw for the series is the name of the immortal detective.

So how did this all begin? While the springs of creation are always ultimately mysterious, they are never entirely hidden. As with every mystery, there are clues. The most promising sources, as with most writers, are biographical.

Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1859. He was a healthy, athletic lad, who appeared to have a happy childhood. He grew up in a middle-class family with a keen sense of his place in society and history. His family was originally from Ireland. His grandfather, John Doyle, like many gifted Irishmen, had moved to London, where he made his name as a political cartoonist. His four sons all became artists of one sort or another. Conan Doyle's Uncle Richard knew Dickens; a warm letter from the great novelist survives in the family archives. Richard was also a friend of William Thackeray, whose works he had illustrated. The author of *Vanity Fair* once bounced young Arthur on his knee while paying a visit to Conan Doyle's father, Charles, who worked as a young architect in the Government Office of Works. He carried on the family's artistic tradition by painting in his spare time. Arthur's mother, Mary, also of Irish parentage, traced her descent back to the Plantagenets on one side and Sir Walter Scott on the other, both sources of considerable pride. Arthur Conan Doyle grew up in a stable society well worth valuing. Nothing in his early life gave him any reason to be a reformer. His great detective would one day uphold the values of this social order, acting as a mainstay of the status quo.

Arthur had a very good education. His thorough knowledge of both ancient and modern classics is clear from reading the Holmes stories. His parents sent him to Jesuit boarding schools, where he initially rebelled against their harsh discipline, as well as the dullness of his studies. His outlook changed when he discovered the essays of English historian and poet Thomas Macaulay, who died the year Conan Doyle was born. Though hardly anyone reads Macaulay today, he was immensely influential in the nineteenth century. Conan Doyle was entranced by his language and his sharp, colorful pronouncements. Macaulay made history a source of wonder and romance. He was also an unapologetic believer in the superiority of British life. It is not as if there weren't a thousand springs from which any young British boy could drink in this notion, but Macaulay supplied a river of it to Conan Doyle. He carried a volume of the essays around with him the rest of his life, claiming that Macaulay had influenced him more than anyone else.

After graduation from boarding school, it was time to choose a career. Since it appeared that Conan Doyle did not inherit the family's artistic genes, he decided on a career in medicine. It was at the medical school in Edinburgh that he met the two men who would have the most influence on his conception of Holmes. The first was the surgeon Dr. Joseph Bell; Conan Doyle later claimed he was the model for Sherlock Holmes. Bell regularly amazed his students by deducing facts about his patients from minute observations of their appearance and behavior. Conan Doyle's autobiography, *Memories and Adventures* (see "For Further Reading"), lists only one example of the doctor's deductive powers.

In one of his best cases he said to a civilian patient: 'Well, my man, you've served in the army' 'Aye, Sir.' 'Not long discharged?' 'No, Sir.' 'A Highland regiment?' 'Aye, Sir.' 'A non-com

officer?’ ‘Aye, Sir.’ ‘Stationed at Barbados?’ ‘Aye, Sir.’ ‘You see, gentlemen,’ he would explain, ‘the man was a respectful man but did not remove his hat. They do not in the army, but he would have learned civilian ways had he been long discharged. He has an air of authority and he is obviously Scottish. As to Barbados, his complaint is Elephantiasis, which is West Indian and not British’ (p. 330).

That could well be Sherlock Holmes interrogating a visitor at 221B Baker Street. Bell’s reasoning powers made so strong an impression on Conan Doyle that he turned to those memories when he decided to write a detective novel. When the first twelve stories were published in book form as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Conan Doyle asked Bell if he might dedicate them to him. Robert Louis Stevenson, who also knew Bell, wrote to congratulate Conan Doyle on “your very ingenious and very interesting adventures of Sherlock Holmes.” At the end of the letter Stevenson asks, “Only one thing troubles me: can this be my old friend Joe Bell?”

Dr. Bell wasn’t the only model, though. Some aspects of Holmes were derived from George Budd, a fellow medical student Conan Doyle met on the school’s rugby team. Brilliant but mercurial, Budd could talk expansively on subject after subject, then lapse into moody silence. The life of the party one moment, he could turn violent the next. The two were friends at medical school, but they lost track of one another when Budd moved away after graduation in 1881. In 1882, after Conan Doyle had spent some postgraduate time at sea, Budd summoned him to Plymouth, England, to start a practice there.

Budd had made a tremendous success of his practice by flouting every rule of medical etiquette. He yelled at his patients, pushed some against walls, cursed others, told many they ate too much, drank too much, and slept too much. Sometimes Budd refused even to see them, proclaiming to an anxious clutch in the waiting room that he was going to spend the day in the country. Despite this bizarre behavior, or perhaps because of it, his consulting services were enormously popular. No doubt a contributing reason was that he charged no fee for his diagnoses. It was no coincidence, however, that Budd prescribed medicine for every patient. Their pills could be conveniently purchased down the hall, where Mrs. Budd typed up the labels for the bottles and took the patients’ money. Budd earned a fortune from this dubious practice. He made a point each day on his way to the bank to carry his earnings in a big bag through the doctors’ quarter of the city, jingling it as he went, just to rankle his fellow practitioners. He was convinced that the rules of medical ethics were a con game to keep young, energetic doctors subservient to their elders.

Conan Doyle was both appalled and amused by this display. When Budd offered to take him on as an assistant, however, he accepted. Budd furnished Conan Doyle with a consulting room in his clinic and then flooded him with advice on how to run his life. One suggestion was to start a novel that very day. Although he had already published one short story, Conan Doyle hadn’t considered writing anything as ambitious as a novel. But because he had no patients as yet and thus plenty of time on his hands, he gave it a try.

There is no evidence that Sherlock Holmes was born out of this circumstance, or that Budd contributed anything more to the character than his energy, range of interests, and black moods. But he contributed something else essential that runs throughout Conan Doyle’s work. Through Budd Conan Doyle experienced deception and betrayal for the first time. Of course Conan Doyle knew, as we all do, that people can lie and turn against former friends, but it makes a different and certainly deeper impression when it happens to you personally. It came about in the following way.

During his time in Budd's clinic, Conan Doyle's mother wrote him letters expressing her displeasure at his involvement with Budd, whom she considered an unscrupulous character. Budd apparently read them without Conan Doyle's knowledge, and developed a bitter resentment against his friend. At some point he complained that his own practice was dwindling because of Conan Doyle. As Conan Doyle, unlike Budd, really was a man of honor, he immediately went to his office door with a hammer and pulled off his nameplate.

This display of character softened Budd's resentment, at least for a while. He proposed to lend Conan Doyle a pound a week to help him set up a practice in Portsmouth. Once Conan Doyle moved to that city to restart his medical career, Budd reneged on the payment. He wrote to Conan Doyle quoting what he considered slanderous passages from a letter of Conan Doyle's mother, which he claimed the maid had found torn in pieces under the grate. This kind of back-stabbing carried on under his roof was a betrayal he couldn't forgive, said Budd. He would have nothing more to do with Conan Doyle.

Conan Doyle was stunned. Upon thinking it over, he couldn't remember ever tearing up any of his letters. Searching through his pockets he found the very one from which Budd had quoted. He realized Budd was lying and must have been reading his mail surreptitiously. He wrote back to say he had seen through the clumsy plot, thanking Budd for removing the only disagreement between himself and his mother by confirming her low opinion of Budd. He assured Budd that any attempt to harm him had backfired.

The incident left a haunting memory. Conan Doyle wrote later, "It was as though in the guise and dress of a man I had caught a sudden glimpse of something subhuman—of something so outside my own range of thought that I was powerless against it" (*The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 271). He was always powerless to explain it. Whenever he depicts some descent into the abyss of vice, it is inevitable without any insight into how a soul makes such a journey: It is always taken as merely a fact of existence.

It was a few years later, in 1886, after he had set up a mildly profitable medical practice of his own that Conan Doyle first turned to the idea of a detective novel. In addition to his Edinburgh model, Sherlock Holmes had literary sources, too. Conan Doyle had read and admired the detective stories of Edgar Allan Poe, the creator of the genre, as well as the detective novels of Émile Gaboriau, whose Monsieur Lecoq solved some baffling crimes. Holmes's methods are similar to those of Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, and the stories have a structure reminiscent of Gaboriau's work, but his personality owes nothing to either of those Parisian detectives. And ultimately it is his personality that makes Holmes so compelling.

Just what is it about Sherlock Holmes that has captivated people for so long? It's easy to see some of the reasons for his popularity. His intelligence, his self-assurance, his mastery of every situation, and his unerring judgment are all enormously appealing. We are also attracted by Holmes's sense of humor. From the very first Holmes not only sprinkles the stories with his dry retorts and ironic asides, he also laughs, chuckles, smiles, and jokes throughout. This quality goes a long way toward humanizing him, making it easier to feel affection for a character whose abilities could well make him seem more machine than human.

His eccentricities add to his appeal. An unwritten rule says that every commentator must mention the tobacco he keeps in the toe end of his Persian slipper, the cigars he keeps in a coal-shuttle, and the unanswered correspondence he transfixes by a jack-knife into the very center of his wooden

mantelpiece. But his odd qualities extend further than these surface details. They are really on shallow tricks that add some local color, perhaps, to his characterization, but reveal little about his character. More revealing of just how truly eccentric he is are the passions central to his mind and the lengths he is willing to go in their service.

Devoting his life to fighting crime, for instance, is surely unusual. With his skills and connections one would think he could have had his choice of careers. What sort of person dedicates himself to catching people who commit crimes? We don't need a psychiatrist's shingle to conclude that someone who feels this need must have suffered some sort of injustice as a child. As we can never know what this sad event was, we can only speculate, and many have. Whatever it was, it has made Holmes a moralist. It is not the law that he upholds, but his own conception of justice. Several times he substitutes this conception for the letter of British law by letting someone go who is guilty of a crime. Several other times he violates the law himself in order to bring about some higher justice. Those are some of the things we admire about him. Because we always agree with his judgment in those instances, his willingness to become the final arbiter of justice makes him heroic.

Holmes lives as a gentleman, with all the notions of class in nineteenth-century England that the word implies. Yet he does things no gentleman would dream of doing. On one occasion he disguises himself as a beggar, on another as an opium addict, and, most improbably of all, on another as an old woman! Since these disguises help him get to the truth, we think of them, if we think of them at all, as merely techniques, albeit clever and entertaining ones, for solving crimes. But respectable men in London in the 1890s would be aghast at seeing a fellow they knew sauntering forth in a frock and wig, or holed up in an opium den. Neither would such men pay any but the most begrudging and uncomfortable notice to street urchins beseeching them for alms. Yet Holmes not only befriends such boys, he enlists them as extra eyes and ears. Dubbing them "the Baker Street Irregulars," he also seems to feel affection and sympathy for them. But then "respectability" is achieved by conforming to an external set of shared beliefs. Holmes couldn't care less what any one else might think of his actions, so long as those actions help him bring criminals to their just deserts. His self-worth comes from measuring up to his own moral code.

Holmes's attitude toward class distinctions is also unusual for his time, and may be an added reason he is popular in America. His judgments about people arise from the content of their characters, not from the color of their coats of arms. He shows the most respect for characters who display loyalty to someone they love, particularly when they also exhibit courage. Irene Adler in "A Scandal in Bohemia," Grant Munro in "The Yellow Face," and Captain Jack Crocker in "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange" all gain his respect because they show these qualities. It's surely significant that none of those characters are upper class. Aristocrats and even royalty usually fare rather less well in his estimation. His acidic assessment of the King of Bohemia seems to go right over the royal head. Holmes sternly rebukes Lord Holderness in "The Adventure of the Priory School" as if he were a judge scolding a prisoner in the dock. He can scarcely conceal his distaste for Lord Robert St. Simon in "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor," and we read in "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs" that he refused an offer of knighthood from Edward VII. It isn't that he dislikes these people because of their class. He accepts an emerald pin from Queen Victoria in "The Adventure of the Bruce Partington Plans," and he's perfectly gracious to the title family in "The Musgrave Ritual." It's that he expects everyone, irrespective of their class, to live up to a common set of human values.

Lest he seem impossibly superior, Holmes is given some counterbalancing weaknesses. He is wrong from time to time, though usually about something trifling. He is inclined to be critical of the people

around him, including Watson, when they haven't met what seems like some impossibly high standard. Some could see this trait as one of his strengths, though, since he holds himself to the same standard. More important, he is what we would call today a manic-depressive. He comes alive only when on the trail of crime, but not just any crime. It must have some special feature that baffles ordinary mortals. When no crime worthy of his skills is currently afoot, he lapses into listlessness requiring cocaine for stimulation. Cocaine was not illegal at the time; these were the 1880s and 1890s, the time of bohemians in the European capitals, the absinthe drinkers of Degas, and the drug-induced aestheticism of the fin-de-siècle. Though not illicit, this dependency is clearly a character flaw.

The sum of all his qualities makes Sherlock Holmes seem like a real person. This sense of his reality sets these stories apart from other literature, and from the very beginning the illusion of his existence was powerful. On October 29, 1892, an article called "The Real Sherlock Holmes" by "Our Special Correspondent" appeared in the *National Observer*. It quoted Sherlock Holmes complaining about the way Conan Doyle had plagiarized Dr. Watson. Holmes also expressed indignation at Conan Doyle's misrepresentations of some of his cases. He didn't make any of those little mistakes Conan Doyle ascribes to him. The *Strand Magazine*, which published all the short stories, received letters wanting to know if Holmes were a real person. The magazine cagily replied that it had not made his personal acquaintance but would certainly call upon him if ever it needed a mystery investigated.

Even after it was well known that Holmes was a fictional creation, a curious phenomenon developed that has no other parallel in literature. It has become a good-humored convention for Holmes scholars to treat the stories as historical events and the protagonists as real figures. Conan Doyle is often referred to as the literary agent for Dr. John H. Watson. Several biographies have been written about Holmes, and the current residents of Baker Street still get mail addressed to him. In October 2002 the Royal Society of Chemistry in Britain awarded an Honorary Fellowship to Sherlock Holmes, its first fictional inductee, on the hundredth anniversary of his coming out of retirement to solve the case of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

In addition to his own characteristics, Holmes is popular for other reasons. The plots and the atmospheres of the stories deserve no small credit for creating the Holmes appeal. Conan Doyle's skill in vividly describing London has made countless readers feel they know the city. The inclusion of so many accurate details from daily life in the city—from train stations and schedules, concert series, real-life performers, streets and buildings they passed every day—gave contemporaneous readers a sense they might be reading an account from the newspapers. The inclusion of many real historical characters strengthens the sense that we are reading a personal memoir. The stories were also initially popular because of the novelty of the scientific method used by Holmes in solving his mysteries—something we can't help but take for granted now.

Holmes profits enormously by having his exploits narrated by an admirer. Nearly as well known but much less appreciated, the good Dr. Watson provides not only a contrast as the Everyman to Holmes's Superman, he also perfectly embodies the British man in the street. Conan Doyle himself has often been thought the model for Holmes's friend and chronicler. Like Watson, Conan Doyle was a doctor. Also like Watson, who we learn was a rugby player in his youth, Conan Doyle was an avid footballer. He was also a boxer, cricket player, and golfer. He was an all-round sportsman, and like other sportsmen, then and now, he had an uncomplicated attitude toward the world. Conan Doyle was like Watson in another way that's scarcely believable except for the testimony of people who knew him. According to Hesketh Pearson he was apparently as little likely to deduce something about you as Watson was. (*Conan Doyle: His Life and Art*, pp. 183-184). The obvious difference between Conan

Doyle and Watson is that Watson did not have the capacity to invent a character like Sherlock Holmes. Generations of readers have been grateful that Arthur Conan Doyle did, and that he used the capacity to enrich our imaginations by creating a hero who reassures us that even the most baffling mysteries can be solved by reason, and who challenges us to use our powers of observation.

If you are reading these stories for the first time or renewing your acquaintance with them after decades of fond but faded memories, I urge you, as other editors of these stories have urged the readers before me, to proceed directly to the sitting room at 221B Baker Street, where you may test your detective powers against the Master's. Come back to the following essay after you've finished. We'll have much to talk about.

Kyle Freeman

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