The Bilge Pump

Vol. 13, No. 02 February, 2025

The Irregular Publication of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star

founded November, 1970

PLEASE NOTE: March 02, 2025 Meeting NOTICE

We will be conducting our next monthly meeting virtually on **March 02** at 1:00 pm central. I will send out the link for the meeting the week before the meeting. The story for the month is "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman".

Bob Katz, BSI, ASH, will lead the discussion on the story of "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman".

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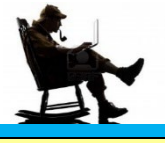

For more information concerning our society, visit: http://www.dfw-sherlock.org/

You can follow us on Twitter at: @barquelonestar

You can friend us on Facebook at: http://www.facebook.com/BarqueLoneStar

Who dunnit: 	**Third Mate** **Helmsman** **Spiritual Advisors** **Secretary** **Historian** **Webmaster**	**Steve Mason, BSI** **Walter Pieper** **Don Hobbs, BSI** **Dr. Jim Webb, BSI** **Cindy Brown, BSI** **Pam Mason** **Rusty Mason**	**mason.steve8080@gmail.com** **waltpieper@att.net** **221b@verizon.net** **jimrwebb@ix.netcom.com** **myrkrid08@yahoo.com**

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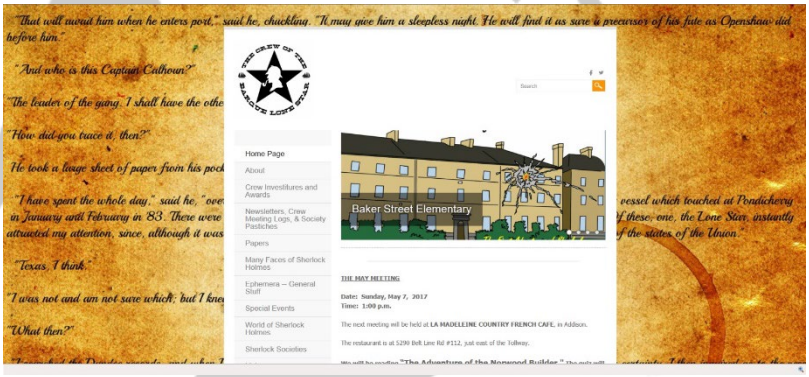

Our Facebook Page:

https://www.facebook.com/BarqueLoneStar/

FEBRUARY 02 SUMMARY

There were **77** in attendance at this ZOOM meeting.

The meeting was begun with an opening toast by **Jane Almquist**, a Christopher Morley poem. (see page 5).

We the had a quiz on today's story, "The Lion's Mane."

Bob Katz then led a discussion on the story, but asking "how does Sherlock Holmes come across to us, when he is the narrator, rather than Watson?"

Some of the answers were, not so cerebral, more human and less cocky.

We had a number of announcements this month, including the following: *Mr. Holmes Neighborhood* is on sale now by Barnes and Noble, as are the previous eight publications by the Crew of the Barque Lone Star. Thanks so much to Liese Sherwood-Fabre for her efforts to finalize each of our books.

The next book that the Crew will be working on will be "Rejected Holmes". The premise will be stories that were rejected by the Strand Magazine, and/or why they were rejected. It can be the rejection letter from the Strand to Watson, or the story itself.

Steve Mason, our Third Mate mentioned that the Crew doesn't have any dues, however we do have expenses, such as the Zoom membership. It someone would like to make a donation to Steve through PayPal, to cover such costs, it would be very appreciated.

Robin Rowles announced the Sherlock Holmes Society of London will be celebrating it's 75th anniversary next year, and he would like to see as many of the Crew there to help celebrate as possible.

Ed Pettit noted the next meeting of the South Downers will be held on Feb. 15, and then March 15, and April 19.

Olivia Kirkendall announced the New Alkaline Plainsmen will be meeting virtually on Feb. 21, from 6pm until 8 pm, and will be celebrating their one year anniversary.

Rob Nunn noted the next meeting of the Parallel Case of St. Louis will be discussing "A Case of Identity," on Feb. 8.

Shana Carter noted that the next Ash Dinner will be help on Feb. 5.

Two of our Crew Members were invested as BSI members at the BSI dinner. Congratulations to **Shana Carter, BSI**, and **Beth Gallegos, BSI**, two very deserving members.

The next meeting of the Shaka Sherlockian's of Hawaii will meet virtually this Saturday, Feb. 8. The meeting will be at 6 pm Eastern Time.

On March 21 and 22 the Dayton society will be sponsoring Holmes, Doyle, and Friends.

In April there will be the 221B Con event in Atlanta, GA.

Edith Ponden announced the next Legion of Zoom conference will be held on March 16, with a great lineup of speakers.

The Torist Internationals will be holding their next meeting on March 29.

There will be a play "Baskerville" to be staged in Houston coming up. Stay tuned for details.

The Baker Street Elementary comic strip is celebrating it's 10-year anniversary with 546 comic strips.

Sandy Kozinn entertained us with a limerick related to today's story.

Rich Krisciunas educated us with his offering of Sherlock Holmes Law 101.

The featured presenter of the day was **Rudy Altergott, BSI**, who spoke on Chicago in the Canon and Beyond.

He reminded people the Torist International society will be sponsoring a conference on Vincent Sterrett in October 2026.

Brad Keefauver gave us his version of the Sherlockian Top 10.

Shana Carter did a reading from the Baker Street Journal, Vol.3, No. 3, 1953, entitled "The Least of These" (see page 6).

Rich Krisciunas closed the meeting with a toast to the Crew of the Barque Lone Star.

SHERLOCK HOLMES' PRAYER

Jane Almquist

The prayer of the world's greatest consulting detective, by Christopher Morley, BSI

Grant me, O spirit of Reason, matter for Deduction, Intuition, and Analysis; plenty of three-pipe problems, that I may avoid the cowardice of seven percent cocaine, or at least substitute something a little special in white wines.

Grant me newspapers, telegrams, and the grind of carriage wheels against the kerb; the meditative breakfast at morning; the unexpected client in the night-time. And, occasionally, the alerting word grotesque.

Strengthen me not to astonish the good Watson merely for theatrical pleasure; yet always to be impatient of Unmitigated Bleat; and of Guessing, which rots the logical faculty.

If in hours of dullness neither the Turkish bath nor mediaeval charters, nor my scrapbooks nor my fiddle avail to soothe, turn my attention to the infallible reactions of chemistry—or to that rational and edifying insect the Bee.

Remind me that there is a season of forgiveness for misfortune; but never for the incredible imbecility of bunglers (from LeCoq to Lestrade).

In all the joys of action let me not forget the intellectual achievements of lethargy; to wit, Mycroft; and, slightly less to wit, Moriarty.

Burden me not with unrelated facts, but encourage the habit of synthetic observation, collating the distinctions between the various. As the hand of the lithotyper is to that of the cork-cutter, so are the types of the Morning Mercury those of the Yorkshire Post.

Remember, O spirit, to Segregate the Queen. Viz., the fair sex is Watson's department. For me, the Mind is All. But one confession in remembrance: the pistol-shot initials on the sitting-room wall were not what Watson thought. In the name of that Gracious Lady my favorite letters were the last two. I was writing not VR but IA. The Baker Street Underground shook my aim.

Hold fast the doctrine: When all impossibles are eliminated, what remains, however improbable, must be the Truth.

Then, O spirit, be the Game Afoot!

Though Holmes first thought it a cat,
McPherson's pain wasn't from that.
When it turned out the thing
Was a Lion's Mane sting
A boulder then crushed the thing flat.

Sandy Kozinn, Deckmate

THE LEAST OF THESE…

Shana Carter, ASH

From the *Baker Street Journal*, Volume 3, number 3, 1953, Editor: Edgar W. Smith

There is a considerable body of carefully researched and recorded opinion as to which, of all the short tales, are the best. Each of us has our owm views, of course; but something approaching a consensus does exist.

Dr. A. C. Doyle, for example, expressed himself to the point in connection with a contest run in the Strand Magazine back in March, 1927: the Agent's elections, in order of preference, were The Speckled Band, The Red-Headed League, The Dancing Men, The Final Problem. A Scandal in Bohemia, The Empty House, The Five Orange Pips, The Second Stain, The Devil's Foot, The Priory School, The Musgrave Ritual, and The Reigate Squires.

Then, in January, 1944, the B. S. I. polled its own membership on the question, with the result that the "Twelve Best" were cited as The Speckled Band, A Scandal in Bohemia, The Red-Headed League, Silver Blaze, The Dancing Men, The Musgrave Ritual, The Five Orange Pips, The Final Problem, The Empty House, Bruce-Partington Plans, The Second Stain, and The Devil's Foot.

The close correspondence of these lists is a tribute to Dr. Doyle's detached discernment, and other checks that have been made from time to time show that the old favorites hold their own quite consistently.

What do our readers think? It would be interesting to compile a new, aggregate appraisal of the "Twelve Best," if only to see how the old lists have worn; but it would also be interesting to learn what twelve tales stand lowest in the esteem of the composite Sherlockian -- not the "worst" of the lot, be it understood; for there are no worst: but simply the least in their significance and import.

And suppose The Three Gables does show up poorly, as we think it will. All, all is relative -- for would we not still prefer to read of Mrs. Maberley and the doings she had with Sherlock Holmes than of any other person, anywhere, who had doings with someone else than Sherlock Holmes?.

To subscribe to the Baker Street Journal, go to https://bakerstreetirregulars.com/the-baker-street-journal/

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Society has published 9 wonderful books. Each book is chocked full of wonderful essays and pastiches by our own Society members. You may download a free copy of the books (as .pdf files) on our website…

https://www.dfw-sherlock.org/society--crew-member-anthologies-pastiches.html

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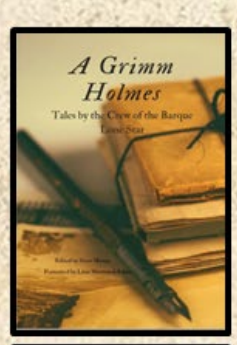

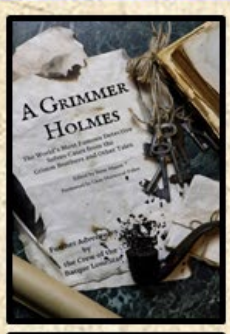

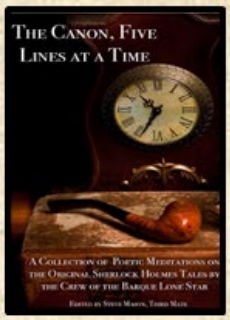

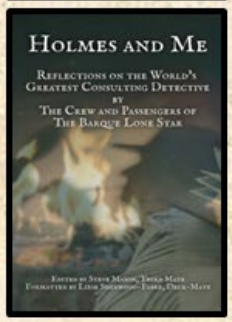

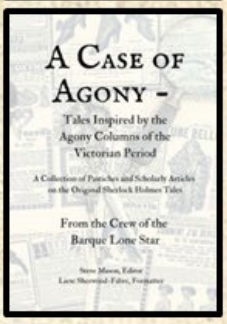

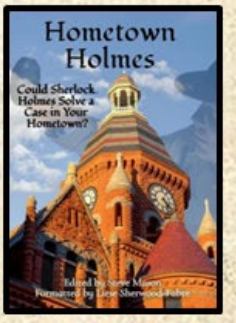

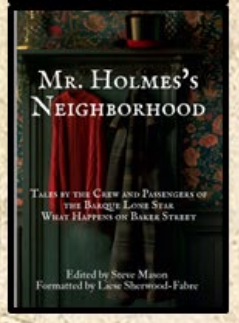

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Society is producing our 10th book in our 55th year of existence.

Dr. Watson published 60 stories chronicling his adventures with Sherlock Holmes, most of them in the Strand Magazine. Any he mentioned many, many, unchronicled cases. But have you ever wondered, did the Strand ever reject any of the stories?

Rejected Sherlock will finally reveal those stories the Strand would not publish, for whatever reason.

1. Stories should be 3,000 – 5,000 words, which is the average length for a short story. Obviously, a shorter story is fine.
2. Your story will be edited by one or two member volunteer editors, but only for grammar, typos… we will not edit the content of your story.
3. This project is not limited to just those members in the DFW area. Any member, or true Sherlockian, is welcome to submit a pastiche.
4. We plan to finalize the anthology by the end of the calendar year, so we ask for members to submit their entry by October 1.
5. Remember this is a family book, with minors participating, when picking up a topic.
6. We ask that you not only provide the story, but the actual rejection letter from the Strand editor.

The final product will be put together in book form and posted on our website and shared with all society members as a .pdf file. We plan on publishing copies of the book as a gift for those who submit a pastiche in the anthology. The book will then be sold on Barnes & Noble, along with our other books at cost.

JOHN H. WATSON NEVER WENT TO CHINA

Jay Finley Christ (March, 1949), Baker Street Miscellanea

From this time forward, John Dickson Carr's Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is indispensable to all Sherlockian scholars and to students of Conan Doyle. It is a splendid and revealing book, though it does not (in my opinion) wholly displace Pearson' s *Conan Doyle: His Life and Art*, nor Doyle's own *Memories and Adventures*: Whether or not it does displace them, however, is another story. Just at the moment, I should like to tug gently -- even if maybe a little impolitely -- at an exposed small thread which is not essential to the integrity of the fabric of Mr. Carr's book. It has to do with the "origin" of Dr. John H. Watson, a character almost as famous as Sherlock Holmes.

Page 46 of Mr. Carr's splendid book is concerned with the origin of the patronymic of the beloved John H. Watson, M.D. It says:

> There was a real name that he might use; it suggested the burly and the commonplace. A friend of Doyle's at Southsea, also a leading member of the Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society, was a young doctor named Watson: James Watson. Surely Watson wouldn't mind the use of his surname if the first were changed to John? Down it went as John H. Watson.

As evidence of the validity of this conclusion: this James Watson was president of the Society in 1890 and he presided at a farewell dinner in honor of Conan Doyle in December of that year.

A considerable time before Mr. Carr' s book was available, I had considered this James Watson as a possible model for John H.; but although the British Medical Directory for 1889 showed that Dr. James was a resident of Southsea in that year, I had given up on him because the Directory provides the following data:

1. James took his M. D. at Edinburgh University in 1863;
2. He was author of an article, *The English Doctor in Southern Manchuria*, published in *Edinburgh Medical Journal* in 1864;
3. He was editor or author of certain medical yearly reports of the British Consular Service at Newchwang, China, for the years 1871-1883, inclusive;
4. He was listed in 1889 as "late physician British Consulate and Imperial Customs at Newchwang."

It is extremely improbable that James had returned to England in time to pose for the portrait of Dr. John H. Watson, for *A Study in Scarlet* was written in March- April, 1886, and Conan Doyle had chosen his characters' names before he wrote the story. (1) Dr . James did not seem to be related to John H.

When Mr. Carr's book appeared, the statement quoted above brought out the Directory again. It was clear at once that James was not a "young" friend of Doyle in the late '80's. James had been in practice since Conan Doyle was about four years old. (2) Yet, there was Mr. Carr's assertion, and there was the hiatus in my own information as to Dr. James. I was not sure just how long he had been in England -- if he had been there at all -- when *A Study in Scarlet* was written; and so the search was resumed.

The Directory listed both Conan Doyle and Dr. James as Members of the General Council of Edinburgh University, which seemed to promise a basis for some intimacy between the men; but it became abundantly clear that the General Council was merely an association of graduates of the university a· sort of alumni association - - a body with electoral powers and of considerable other influence, but of no present help to us. (3)

Next went an inquiry to The Foreign Office, No. 10 Downing Street, London. In three weeks (March 20, 1949) came a reply from The Keeper of the Papers - - a grand Victorian (or maybe Chaucerian) designation which should be gobbled up by some scion of the B.S.I.

The letter said , so far as relevant here:

> "Dr. James Watson was born on the 24th June, 1839… early in 1865 he left Edinburgh for China, arriving at Newchwang on 2nd May, 1865. On that date he took up his appointment as physician to Her Majesty's Consulate... He retained that position until his resignation on the 30th September, 1885. There are no records of the exact dates on which he left China and arrived in Engl and, but he was residing in Southsea in March 1886 . It would therefore appear, in view of travel conditions in those days, that he would have left China shortly after his resignation…"

The last quoted sentence seems to justify an inference that James did not leave Roman before the date of his resignation; and also that he could not have been in Southsea very long before March 1886. Apparently he had to leave "shortly after his resignation in order to be in Southsea at all in March, 1886.

Other things tend to support this latter inference. If he left Edinburgh "early in 1865" and reached Newchwang on May 2nd, passage time must have involved some sixty to ninety days. True, transportation may have improved somewhat in twenty years , but Whitaker's *Almanack* shows that in those days the mail schedule from Pekin to London involved forty days. It is common knowledge that passenger transport was normally slower than the mails; it is some 300 miles from Newchwang to Pekin; and all together James could hardly have made his trek of more than 12,000 miles, settled with the Foreign Office and reached Southsea very much before January, 1886. He might have made it by Christmas, but it may have been deep in January. At his best he could hardly have got to Southsea in time to influence the christening of Conan Doyle's "puppets" (4) nor in time to become a "leading member" of the Portsmouth Society by March-April, 1886. (5)

James may have been chosen president of the society in 1890 (& so automatically presided at the farewell dinner in December of that year) just because his name was Wat son; or his rise to leadership and his election may have been based upon his long service in an out-post of the Empire and to the character which he possessed. If the latter were the reasons -- and they seem the more likely, for Dr . John H. was not yet very famous in 1890 -- then the similitude of the two surnames was "entirely coincidental."

If Mr. Carr has more data about James Watson's life between September 30, 1885, and the time of the naming of John H. Watson, the Sherlockian world would like to know "what ever there is to know;" but until such data are made available , I cannot string along with his hypothesis: it does not square with Doyle' s own statement, and the time element renders the hypothesis so nearly impossible that I cannot accept it without more data. On the basis of present information, it seems pretty nearly certain that Dr. James Watson was not a model for and did not give his name to John H. Watson, M.D., comrade and chronicler of Sherlock Holmes. Certainly James was not young, nor a leading member of the society early enough; and it is highly improbable -- if not quite impossible -- that James could have been a friend of Conan Doyle for any significant period of time before John H. Watson got his name.

Since it may seem unseemly to adjourn upon a negative note, I offer another suggestion. It is mere surmise, but it: holds some promise of interest.

In Logan Turner's *Sir William Turner*, some interest-facts are presented. One Patrick Heron Watson was assistant surgeon to The Royal Infirmary of the University of Edinburgh in the early 1860's. He was promoted to surgeon in 1863. He chose for his assistant one Edwards (not Birdy Edwards , but possibly his brother). Dr. Joseph Bell was an unsuccessful applicant for the same appointment. The latter information elevated my blood-pressure a few c.'s of mercury, as the doctors have it; and while the fit was upon me, I searched further for the possibilities of a Bell-Watson-Doyle relationship.

In 1865, when Edwards died prematurely, Joseph Bell became Heron Watson's assistant; and in 1871, when Watson was again promoted, Bell himself became head surgeon and "at once established himself as a favorite clinical teacher." (6)

Heron (as his familiars called him) was a stormy petrel of medical education, as John H. became a stormy 'petrel of crime' as related in The Naval Treaty. Among other things, Heron was among the very first to insist upon equal rights and status for women in medical education, in clinical work and all. Heron's colleagues disliked him heartily and bitterly for it, because it drained away their students and so cut into their revenues. The boys apparently liked to have the girls in the clinics with them, and so they went where the girls were.

While the pressure was on, I put together my data. Heron Watson had passed up Joseph Bell in 1863. True, he surrendered in 1865 and Bell followed Watson up the ladder in 1871, after which Bell became a popular teacher. Heron's rejection of Bell in the first round may have been the basis for a student prejudice against the older man; such prejudice may have descended through a couple of generations of students; Heron Watson was still active and Bell was still a favorite when Doyle was at Edinburgh; and as Doyle recalled Bell and wrote of Holmes, some of the old prejudice may have adhered to him, so that both the Watson and the H. may have descended for these reasons.

There is another train of thought which produces the same result and in a manner more pleasant to take. I may be doubted that Heron Watson was the source of the surname in the Saga, because Heron Watson was not a commonplace man; but let us recall that John H. Watson was not commonplace either, no matter what Conan Doyle started out to make him. In any case, Heron may well have been the original of the H. in our John's name. If Sherlock Holmes was designed after Joseph Bell, why may we not suppose that Watson was named after Patrick Heron -- not in spite, but as a distinct honor? Heron would have been an unusual original for a distinctive character. And so I think it was that our man was John Heron Watson, and that he had never been in China in his life.

Notes

1. Holmes "must have a commonplace comrade as a foil -- an educated man… A drab, quiet name for this unostentatious man. Watson would do. And so I had my puppets and wrote my 'Study in Scarlet'." *Memories and Adventures* (1924), p. 69. The name Watson was common enough. In '89 there were 52 Watsons in the Directory as licensed to practice medicine. An earlier edition of the Directory was not available.
2. Moreover, no doctor would be apt to be very much elated to know that his name was used because it was a drab one for an unostentatious character - a "commonplace comrade" for Sherlock Holmes.
3. A. Logan Turner, *Sir William Turner: A Chapter in Medical, History* (1919), Blackwood & Sons, Edin. & London.
4. Remember that the names were chosen before the tale was written. N. 1, above.
5. By 1891, when Doyle wrote “The Man With The Twisted Lip,” James could have met all of the qualifications ascribed by Carr (except that of youth), so that Doyle, even though no longer residing at Southsea, might well have had James temporarily in mind, as occasion from Mrs. J.H. Watson' s error in referring to her man as James.
6. Logan Turner, *Story of a Great Hospital: The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh* (1937); Oliver & Boyd, London.

A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT 'THE RETIRED COLOURMAN'

1. Summary (Diogenes Club)

After he retired from his firm which manufactured paint and artists supplies, Amberly married a beautiful, much younger woman. He was a miser and made her life miserable with his niggardly ways.

Amberly frequently played chess with Ernest, a man approximately his wife's age. Ernest and Mrs. Amberly might have been having an affair; at least Mr. Amberly thought so. Amberly had constructed a "Strong room" inside his house which was much like a bank vault. He contrived to lock his wife and Dr. Ernest in this room and flood it with natural gas from an adjacent pipe. They both died from the fumes.

Amberly hid the bodies in an abandoned well and faked an elopement. He called in the police who referred him to Holmes. Holmes was absorbed in another case and sent Watson to investigate.

Barker had been hired by Ernest's family to investigate the matter. Holmes and he crossed paths and continued together. They soon solved the case.

When confronted by the evidence, Amberly tried to poison himself with a capsule. Holmes makes him spit it out with the comment, "No shortcuts, Amberly!"

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2. Story Info Sheet (McMurdo's Camp)

- First published in:
  Liberty, December 18, 1926

- Time frame of story (known/surmised):
  July/August 1898. (It was an affair in which would be the eager debate of all England.

- Holmes & Watson living arrangements:
  Not stated. At the beginning of the story Holmes & Watson are together at 221B but is unclear if Watson is residing there or just calling.

- Opening scene:
  Watson observes client departing from 221B. Discusses case with Holmes, and Holmes sends Watson to investigate at client's house, called The Haven.

- Client:
  Josiah Amberley, a pathetic, futile, broken creature, who had few outward graces. He was like some penurious patrician who has sunk into the company of his inferiors.

- Crime or concern:
  Disappearance of wife (20 years younger) and chess-playing friend of client, with some seven thousand pounds' worth of cash and securities.

- Villain:
  The client turned out to have murdered his wife and her friend/lover.

- Motive:
  Jealousy.

- Logic used to solve:
  Use of paint indicated covering up smell of gas. Holmes sent client and Watson on a trip to get them out of town so he could burgle premises.

- Policemen:
  McKinnon, a smart young police Inspector and good fellow.

- Holmes' fees:
  No mention, but since the client was shown to be the criminal, it is unlikely Holmes got paid. Possibly he had an arrangement with the police, which could account for his allowing them credit for solving the case.

- Transport:
  Watson set forth for Lewisham and returned to Baker St. late that evening. Mode of transport unspecified.
  Watson and client took the 5:20 from Liverpool Street to Little Purlington (on a branch line), and then a two mile drive to the vicarage. It was not a pleasant trip for the weather was hot. Then they took the train back to London the next morning.

- Food:
  The morning following some toast crumbs and two empty eggshells provided evidence that Holmes had risen and left early.

- Drink:
  None mentioned.

- Vices:
  No mention.

- Other cases mentioned:
  The case of the two Coptic patriarchs, which was coming to a head.

- Notable Quotables:
  "Cut out the poetry, Watson," – Holmes
  "You have missed everything of importance, yet even those things which have obtruded themselves upon your notice give rise to serious thought." – Holmes
  "With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice." – Holmes
  "What did you do with the bodies?" – Holmes
  "Pooh! What an awful smell of paint!" – Insp. McKinnon

- Other interestings:
  We at McMurdo's Camp note there are similarities between this case and that of Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen, who murdered his troublesome wife in 1910, fled with his lover, and was captured by the use of wireless telegraphy and a trans-Atlantic chase by ocean liner, a case which was the eager debate of all England.

- When all was said and done:
  Holmes backed away and allowed the police, who discovered of the bodies in a disused well, cleverly concealed by a dog kennel, to take credit for the solution.

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3. Data! Data! Data! (Frank Mentzel)

- # 58 of the 60 stories
  First published in *The Strand Magazine*, January, 1927 In the *US Liberty* Magazine, December 18, 1926
  Part of *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* collection by John Murray, London, 1927
  George D. Doran, New York, 1927
  British illustrator – Frank Wiles
  U.S. ILLUS – Frederick Dorr Steele

- Chronology
  Baring-Gould places the dating of the story at Thursday, July 28 to Saturday, July 30, 1898 making it 45th of the 60. This means that Holmes in 44 and Watson 46.

- Christopher Morley Says

  "When Holmes ate two hard-boiled eggs for breakfast it meant he was on someone's trail. Not satisfied with Dr. Watson's preliminary investigation Holmes went himself to see why Mr. Amberly had been painting his strong room at the time when he would more properly have been secluded in grief and dismay. But Mr. Amberly was a chess player, "the mark of a scheming mind." The history of Sherlock Holmes ends, as it began, with the official police getting the credit."

- Dummies Short Summary

  "Burglary has always been an alternative profession, had I cared to adopt it," remarks Sherlock Holmes. It's a skill he turns to in solving a case of a missing wife and her lover.

- How Many Words

  At 5,559 words RETI has the 2nd most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

- Classifying This Case

  This case is one of 23 classified as a MURDER and one of 14 where the perpetrator was either killed, arrested, or otherwise satisfactorily handled.

- The Best Of Sherlock Holmes
  - 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not have it on his list of 12 favorites.
  - 1959 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 54th on their list of favorites.
  - 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 44th of the 56 short stories.
  - 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 37th of the 56 short stories.

- What Else Happened That Year (1898)
  - Battle of Omdurman in Sudan. Kitchner defeats Mahdi and Dervishes, avenges General Gordon's death
  - Introduction of Imperial Penny Postage.
  - British Goods given preferential tariff in Canada.
  - Congo railway completed to Stanley Pools.
  - Electrification of underground railway from Mansion House to Waterloo.
  - First escalator at Harrods.
  - USS Maine blows up in Havana Harbor, Spanish-American War begins, Spain defeated at Santiago and Manila. Treaty of Paris ends war, Cuba independent, U.S.A. acquires Philippines.
  - Powers appoint Prince George of Greece as High Commissioner in Crete, under Turkish suzerainty.
  - Workmen's Social Democratic Party formed in Russia.
  - "Hundred Days of Reform" in China. Deposition of Kuang-Hsu and reinstatement of Dowager Empress, suppression of reform.
  - U.S.A. annexes Hawaii.
  - End of state of debtor nation for U.S.A., existing since 1783, $500 million foreign investments.
  - Work begins on Aswan Dam.
  - German fleet seizes Kiachow, secures 99-year lease from China.
  - Swiss railways nationalized.
  - Severe food riots in Italy.
  - Zola's J'Accuse.
  - Wells' War of the Worlds.
  - Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol.
  - Curies discover radium and polonium.
  - Pickering, using photography, discovers nine of Saturn's moons.
  - Rudolf Diesel demonstrates his engine, which requires no sparkplugs.
  - M.J. Owens, U.S.A., designs automatic bottle-making machine.
  - Konstantin Tsiolkovski states principles of rocket propulsion.

- Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

  Holmes is residing at Baker Street, but it is unclear if Watson is living there or just calling.

- Dramatis Personae
  One of the smallest casts of a story in the canon
  - Josiah Amberly, the retired colourman.
  - Mrs. Amberly, his wife, 20 years his junior
  - Dr. RAY ERNEST, a chess playing friend of Mr. Amberly
  - Barker, another private investigator and friendly rival of Holmes.
  - Mackinnon, a smart young police officer.

- Quotable Sherlock
  - "Exactly, Watson. Pathetic and futile. But is not all life pathetic and futile?"
  - "He has been sent on by the Yard. Just as medical men occasionally send their incurables to a quack."
  - "The old story, Watson. A treacherous friend and a fickle wife."
  - "Cut out the poetry, Watson."
  - (Watson) 'No of course, it is art for art's sake with him,"
  - "You have missed everything of importance, yet even those things which have obtruded themselves upon your notice give rise to serious thought."
  - "With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice."
  - "It has been done. Thanks to the telephone and the help of the Yard, I can usually get my essentials without leaving this room."
  - "What did you do with the bodies?"
  - "Things must be done decently and in order."
  - "Amberly excelled at chess – one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind."
  - "He felt so clever and so sure of himself that he imagined no one could tough him. He could say to any suspicious neighbor, "'Look at the steps I have taken. I have consulted not only the police, but even Sherlock Holmes.'"

- Holmes' Fee
  No fee is mentioned. Since the client was proven to be the criminal, it is unlikely Holmes got paid. Again, we revert to the possibly that he had an arrangement with the police, which could account for his allowing them credit for solving the case.

- Unrecorded Cases
  Holmes seems to do a lot of work for the different religions
  - The Case of the two Coptic Patriarchs

- Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen
  This story has only been done once by not a famous player but a very good one
  - 1965 The Retired Colourman with Douglas Wilmer in his Sherlock Holmes TV series

- Newspapers
  - North Surrey Observer – Fictional

- Annotated Sherlock
  Just one - - Holmes does love his reference books
  - "Where is my Crockford?" Crockford's Clerical Directory.

- Weapons
  Not your standard weapons, but enough to kill
  - Lethal Gas - Which Josiah Amberly used to murder his wife and her putative lover, Dr. Ray Ernest, after he lured them down into his strong room.
  - Poison Pills - Which Amberly tried to commit suicide with, after the discovery of his crime by Holmes.

4. Case Inquiries (Alexander E. Braun)

"The Adventure of the Retired Colourman" first ran in *Liberty Magazine* on December 18, 1926. It was later published in *The Strand Magazine*, on January 1927. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

It bears the extremely dubious distinction of being the last Sherlock Holmes story that Doctor Watson wrote. As the table shows, our chronologists unanimously agree that 1898 is the year in which this case took place. In 1898, Sherlock Holmes would have been 44 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 46.

- Main Characters:
  Josiah Amberley, the retired colourman and Holmes' client. \
  Mrs. Amberley, Josiah's young wife.
  Dr. Ray Ernest, chess partner of Josiah, and his wife's lover.
  Mr. Barker, a private investigator, who is Holmes' rival.
  Mr. J.C. Elman, Little Purlington's vicar.
  Inspector McKinnon, a clever police officer.

- Notable Quotes:
  "But is not all life pathetic and futile? Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow—misery."
  "He has been sent on by the Yard. Just as medical men occasionally send their incurables to a quack."
  "With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice."
  "Amberley excelled at chess—one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind."
  "Burglary has always been an alternative profession had I cared to adopt it, and I have little doubt that I should have come to the front."

- Watson's Quest

Once more Holmes sends off poor Watson on what turns out to be a pointless investigative quest. On more than one instance, the Master Detective has sent his hapless companion off on a data-gathering mission only to distrust and double-check the Good Doctor's efforts; HOUN comes readily to mind, where he sends Watson ahead, before making his appearance.

A common definition of insanity is doing the exact same thing over and over again expecting a different result. To the point: if our medico's efforts always fall short of the mark, one must wonder why Holmes persists in sending him off on these useless, time-wasting errands, knowing all the time that he was going to have to do the actual work.

Nevertheless, Sherlock Holmes doth protest too much, methinks.

Even if he gets a little impatient with his friend's descriptive tendencies ("Cut out the poetry, Watson. I note that it was a high brick wall."), on more than one occasion he has found his friend's efforts to have been of value. In this case, although Watson did not make love to every barmaid in the area, as Holmes pointed out, "With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice.

What about the girl at the post-office, or the wife of the greengrocer?

I can picture you whispering soft nothings with the young lady at the Blue Anchor, and receiving hard somethings in exchange.

All this you have left undone," he found at least part of the information to be useful.

It must be noted, however, that here he was not quite as biting with his disapproval of Watson's efforts as he usually tends to be: "Don't be hurt, my dear fellow. You know that I am quite impersonal.

No one else would have done better. Some possibly not so well." Clearly, our legendary sleuth was trying to spare his biographer's feelings. Still, the question begs: Why send Watson at all if no one else could have done better.

Nonetheless, later Holmes' seems unusually concerned over his friend's self-esteem. When discussing the case with Inspector MacKinnon he lauds (somewhat too enthusiastically, it seems) the part that the Good Doctor played in the solution of the case: "You can thank Dr. Watson's observation of that.

. . . Another of Dr. Watson's bull's-eyes. . . . He allowed my astute friend to notice the number of his seat."

This is either an atypical reaction by Holmes or most likely a slip of the pen by Watson. It would show that perhaps our detective really was not as harsh with his friend and colleague as the latter has led us to believe. It is quite possible that Holmes' seemingly pitiless asperity towards some of his friend's efforts may have been an exaggeration by his biographer who, in reality, did not do too badly in his quest for information.

Watson's apparent obtuseness—although light years away from being at the level of ineptness of the warmly remembered Nigel Bruce's—seems more of a ploy, a story-telling artifact on his part—by painting himself as being denser than lead in the reasoning department he further magnifies his friend's brilliance.

Holmes himself recognized this when he wrote in LION, “Thus I must act as my own chronicler. Ah! had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty!”

A Peculiar Reference

On more than one occasion Holmes has referred to Watson as the pair’s ladies’ man; however, I am unable to pinpoint any instance in which Watson’s so-called “natural advantages” were of any particular help in a case. In fact, if we are going to talk about someone using his personal wiles on the fair sex, it must be pointed out that it was Holmes who carried out a questionable, successful courting campaign that bordered on seduction!

Undeniably, Watson had an eye for the ladies; this is made abundantly clear by the manner in which he describes them in his writings; however, these amorous proclivities do not seem any more pronounced than that of any reasonably healthy male of his age. Considering a behavior that borders on shyness, it may be that his statement of “an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents,” was somewhat of an exaggeration. His conduct towards Mary Morstan shows this.

It is true that it partly was due to the fact that there was every reason to expect that she would become one of the richest women in England, while he honorably recognized that at the time he was just an invalidated soldier on a penurious pension not quite ready yet to resume his civilian profession. Yet, I think that Watson was shy and could become easily confused when dealing with an attractive lady. As he recollects of the time when he was trying to distract her mind from the matters at hand in SIGN, “I told her one moving anecdote as to how a musket looked into my tent at the dead of night, and how I fired a double-barrelled tiger cub at it.”

Paradoxically, if we are to discuss someone using his personal attraction on the fair sex, it was Holmes who, in CHAS, behaved in an abominably caddish fashion by cold-bloodedly luring a vulnerable woman to fall for him in order to obtain needed information. His behavior was so deplorable, that Watson, ever the considerate gentleman could not contain himself:

“But the girl, Holmes?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“You can’t help it, my dear Watson. You must play your cards as best you can when such a stake is on the table. However, I rejoice to say that I have a hated rival who will certainly cut me out the instant that my back is turned.”

Heartless indeed!

The Bitter Josiah Amberley

Strangely enough, although Josiah Amberley drives the story, he remains one of those canonical characters that one wishes our Biographer had fleshed out a little more; he tells us very little about the man himself.

There is far more complexity to Amberley than what we are able to glimpse from what is given to us by Watson. Nobody is born as full of hate as he was—only is time and life produce this lamentable transformation. Although it would have been superfluous when writing down the case, it still would have been interesting to learn more about the man’s previous life. In A Christmas Carol Dickens reveal what derailed Scrooge from the human race. What events in Amberley’s existence turned him into such a miserly embittered man? For example, how did he lose the leg—illness or accident?

It seems obvious that our colourman must have led a very harsh and difficult existence, that nothing ever came to him easily, and that he had to fight and struggle for everything he was able to accomplish. Later in that tortuous life, when he finally retired with his small fortune of £7,000 (≈$2,600,000) he may have thought that it would compensate for his homeliness and crippledness and he sought a wife. He then made the mistake that many of those unused to women (or men) fall into by seeking a far younger mate. Although such Spring/Autumn marriages were not uncommon then (and even now) he probably would have fared better with someone closer to his own age, not two decades younger.

His treatment of his wife shows that he lacked any practical acquaintance with any companion, let alone the sometimes bewildering gentle sex. Possibly, his only experience with women was restricted to occasional visits to certain low establishments in the stricken East End which very likely resulted in more self-loathing than relief.

This might explain much; including the possibility of his having been infected with a sexually transmitted disease. Watson describes him as being malformed and abnormal. He had a curved back and spindly legs. In disposition he was miserly, niggardly, jealous, unpleasant, combative, and argumentative. This constellation of symptoms could discreetly describe some of the more unpleasant effects of advanced syphilis.

If Amberley had conquered his miserliness and tried to have fun with his wife, perhaps even travel the world—all of which he could have easily afforded—possibly some sort of a conversion might have taken place. However by then it was already too late and what might have developed if not into love, at least tenderness, easily mutated into hatred.

There can be no denial that Amberley had serious mental problems. This is easily discerned through his clear deficiency in judgment, worsened by a full measure of hubris, proven by his going beyond just putting one over on Scotland Yard, but going as far as to consult the famous Sherlock Holmes about his wife's "disappearance." Absurdly, he thought he could actually outwit the Master Sleuth.

This provides a narrow keyhole to his absurd behavior. Was this "pure swank" as Holes described it, or a subconscious desire to be caught? Something similar, perhaps, to what today we would call "suicide by police"?

Had there still remained a semblance of sanity he would have made an effort to survive. Why else would Amberley have seriously considered the possibility that he was not going to get away with his crime to the extent of preparing himself for failure by procuring a suicide pill? This indicates that he was unsure of his success, possibly contradicting the "pure swank" theory.

By preventing him from poisoning himself, Holmes did him no favors. Now he was to be crushed by the massive and unforgiving gears of justice. If found sane, he would be tried for a double murder in the first degree, inevitably ending with a hemp necktie and a nasty short drop; if found to be non compos mentis he would have received permanent accommodations in Broadmoor Hospital, England's oldest high-security psychiatric sanatorium. For the rest of his life he would spend his remaining days amongst the criminally insane, subjected to the severe (and oftentimes purposely cruel) discipline with which the mentally insane were treated back then.

Holmes' grim observation at the beginning of the story perfectly describes Amberley's circumstances:

"But is not all life pathetic and futile? Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow—misery."

The Hated Rival

Mr. Barker, the private investigator, is one of the little piquant side-mysteries of this story. Who was he? Holmes refers to him as his "hated rival upon the Surrey shore" however he unquestionably thought well of the man and respected him. He does not hesitate to comment to MacKinnon, "He has several good cases to his credit, has he not, Inspector?" MacKinnon's reserved reply seems quite revealing: "He has certainly interfered several times." To which Holmes adds, "His methods are irregular, no doubt, like my own. The irregulars are useful sometimes, you know."

This so-called rival's part in the investigation is rather ambiguous. Was he indeed a rival of the Great Detective or did he belong to the organization that included the Baker Street irregulars, Shinwell Johnson, and Langdale Pike among others?

We are told that Barker had "been working independently," yet Holmes states that Barker had "done nothing save what I told him." So which was it? Could it be that he was a student of the Great Detective's methods and he may have in a previous time approached Holmes as a apprentice would his master?

Not uncharacteristically so, Watson is unclear on this as well.

What else happened in 1907:

Empire

Curzon becomes Viceroy of India.

Britain secures lease of the Wei-hei-wei territory from China.

Battle of Omdurman in Sudan. Kitchner defeats Mahdi and Dervishes, avenges General Gordon's death. Fully establishes British rule over Sudan.

Yukon Territory of Canada established, Dawson chosen as capital

Franco-British tension following Fashoda Incident, the climax of imperial territorial disputes between Britain and France in Eastern Africa. A French expedition to Fashoda on the White Nile river seekst to gain control of the Upper Nile river basin and thereby exclude Britain from the Sudan.

Introduction of Imperial Penny Postage.

China leases Hong Kong's new territories to the United Kingdom for 99 years

British goods given preferential tariff in Canada.

Congo railway completed to Stanley Pools.

Britain

Electrification of underground railway from Mansion House to Waterloo.

First escalator at Harrods.

University of London Act reorganizes it as a teaching university.

Agitation against growth of ritualistic practices in the Church of England.

World

Powers appoint Prince George of Greece as High Commissioner in Crete, under Turkish suzerainty.

Workmen's Social Democratic Party formed in Russia.

Caleb Bradham renames his carbonated soft drink "Pepsi-Cola".

"Hundred Days of Reform" in China. Deposition of Kuang-Hsu and reinstatement of Dowager Empress, suppression of reform.

U.S. annexes Hawaii.

Tsar Nikolay II expels Jews from major Russian cities.

First Navy Law is passed by the German Reichstag

End of state of debtor nation for U.S.A., existing since 1783, $500 million foreign investments.

Work begins on Aswan Dam.

Germany's Tirpitz plan.

Military draft introduced in Holland.

Émile Zola's J'Accuse—an open letter addressed to President Félix Faure of France, published in the newspaper L'Aurore by the influential writer, in which he accused the government of anti-Semitism in the unlawful jailing of Alfred Dreyfus, an

Army General Staff officer sentenced to lifelong penal servitude for espionage. Zola was prosecuted for, and found guilty of, libel and fled to England, returning home the following year.

USS Maine blows up in Havana Harbor, Spanish-American War begins, Spain defeated at Santiago and Manila. Treaty of Paris ends war, Cuba independent, U.S.A. acquires Philippines. A year later, Rudyard Kipling dedicates his poem, Take Up the White Man's Burden to the United States.

German fleet seizes Kiachow, secures 99-year lease from China.

U.S. Congress passes the Private Mailing Card Act, allowing private publishers and printers to produce postcards, had to be labelled "Private Mailing Cards" until 1901, known as "souvenir cards."

Foundation of Flottverein (Navy League) in Germany, Reichstag passes first Navy Act.

Swiss railways nationalized.

Empress Elizabeth of Austria is assassinated by Luigi Lucheni

Will Kellogg invents Corn Flakes

U.S. Congress passes a fifty-million-dollar bill to strengthen the military.

Severe food riots in Italy.

The International Conference of Rome for the Social Defense against Anarchists opens.

First auto insurance policy in the U.S. issued by Travelers Insurance Co.

Russia secures 25-year lease of Port Arthur from China.

Art

Wells' War of the Worlds.

Wilde's Ballad of Reading Gaol.

Science and Technology

Pickering, using photography, discovers nine of Saturn's moons.

First telephone message from a submerged submarine.

Curies discover radium and polonium.

Winton Motor Carriage Company publishes the first known automobile ad in Scientific American using the headline "dispense with a horse."

Rudolf Diesel demonstrates his engine, which requires no sparkplugs.

First record of myxomatosis—a rabbit disease.

Ramsay discovers xenon, krypton, and neon, inert atmospheric gases.

French quick-firing "75" gun produced.

M.J. Owens, U.S.A., designs automatic bottle-making machine.

Marconi establishes wireless communication between Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight.

K. Shiga, Japan, discovers bacillus of dysentery.

Konstantin Tsiolkovski states principles of rocket propulsion.

5. Selected Chronologies

a.	The Original Story by Arthur Conan Doyle	Summer, 1898
b.	William Baring-Gould	Thursday, July 28, 1898
c.	H.W. Bell	July, 1898
d.	Roger Butters	1898
e.	Jay Finley Christ	1898
f.	Jean-Pierre Crauser	Friday, July 21, 1899
g.	D. Martin Dakin	August, 1898
h.	Bill Dorn	July or August, 1898
i.	Henry Folsom	Summer, 1898
j.	John Hall	Summer, 1898
k.	Craig Janasek	Thursday, July 28, 1898
l.	Brad Keefauver	Saturday, August 20, 1898
m.	Toshio Suzuki	July, 1898
n.	June Thomson	August, 1898
o.	Ernest Bloomfield Zeisler	July or August, 1898

6. Canonical Queeries (Ralph Edwards, BSI)

- Does an item in a bi-weekly become the "eager debate of all England?"
- What happened to any luggage owned by Mrs. Amberley and Dr. Ernest?
- If Watson had directions to The Haven, which stood out from its neighbors, why did he need Barker's help?
- Was it an island of ancient culture or a dingy sanctum?
- Can a person with an artificial limb spring to his feet?
- If Amberley suspected no intrigue, and no message was left, why did he not fear for his wife's safety rather than think her an accomplice?
- Why did Holmes consider the theater ticket situation remarkable?
- Do box offices keep track of vacant seats that have been paid for?
- What is "an old school number?"
- Why would Mrs. Amberley leave the window open? Was she too lazy to shut the door?
- Does a harsh and exacting husband have a slatternly house and a garden running to seed?
- Was the servant interviewed?
- Is Little Purlington to Lewisham to Baker Street only 50 minutes?
- Why use the telephone exchange to send a one-word message?
- Was the greater surprise that Holmes was not alone, or that he had entered?
- Why did Barker, not Holmes, have a cab at the door?
- What proof is there of an "intimacy" or that Amberley was jealous? Perhaps he only wanted to get rid of a slovenly wife and a competitor who always beat him at chess?
- Who was Holmes' agent? Could he not have sent the message more easily than by going to Little Purlington and running the risk of his description being given to Watson and Amberley?
- If so trapped, would you:
    - stuff a handkerchief in the gas pipe
    - comfort your inamorata
    - light a match
    - try to create a spark, as by flicking a light switch
    - write a message
    - put your pencil in your pocket after becoming senseless
- What lighted the strong-room to permit Dr. Ernest to see to write?
- Who wrote?
- What happened to the indelible pencil?

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7. 17 Steps (Brad Keefauver, BSI)

1. And Now, The End Is Near . . .

Sherlock Holmes begins this last tale with a sad soliloquy: "But is not all life pathetic and futile? Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow -- misery."

Why is Holmes so down? Isn't this the same guy who said his career would be complete if he just freed London of Moriarty's influence? Was it Amberley's story that depressed Holmes so? If so, why?

2. The Card Had Seen A Lot Of Calling

We are told Amberley left Sherlock Holmes "a rather soiled card." Which was worse etiquette in Victorian London: arriving with no calling card or presenting someone with an old, dirty card? Would a calling card see that much reuse? What amounts did Victorians get them printed in? We are told Amberley is a "pathetic, futile, broken creature," but how pathetic was handing out dirty calling cards?

3. That Mysterious Amberly Charm

"Early in 1897 he married a woman twenty years younger than himself--a good-looking woman, too, if the photograph does not flatter."

Josiah Amberly is a nasty-looking old miser with a shabby home and a bad temper. So how did he ensnare a young and attractive wife? Certainly the future Mrs. Amberly would have had other prospects, wouldn't she? (It's interesting to note that Holmes himself is calling her good-looking -- quite a change from his early days.)

4. He's A Poet And He Sure Knows It ...

Watson, who seems almost to be wearing a puffy shirt and wielding an ostrich feather quill pen, says: "You know that particular quarter, the monotonous brick streets, the weary suburban highways. Right in the middle of them, a little island of ancient culture and comfort, lies this old home, surrounded by a high sun-baked wall mottled with lichens and topped with moss, the sort of wall--"

While we've seen Watson write like this before, in this case he's actually speaking this way, which is an entirely different thing. (Just try speaking those lines aloud, as if you were telling Holmes about it.) Does this seem in character for the old army doctor? Might he have been reading from a write-up he did on the way back? Or was it within his character to wax airily aloud about the scenery like that?

5. The Amberly Bodybuilding Plan

"Yet he was not the weakling that I had at first imagined, for his shoulders and chest have the framework of a giant, though his figure tapers away into a pair of spindled legs."

How did Amberly get such a body? Something in the work of a colourman? Disease? Something that connected with his lost leg?

6. The Watson/Ernest Transition

"What of Dr. Ernest?" Holmes asks the good doctor. "Was he the gay Lothario one would expect? With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice. What about the girl at the post-office, or the wife of the greengrocer? I can picture you whispering soft nothings with the young lady at the Blue Anchor, and receiving hard somethings in exchange."

The switch from Dr. Ernest's womanizing to Dr. Watson's way with the ladies seems a little too natural. Did Watson become more of a womanizer in the 1890's? What were his "natural advantages"?

7. The Consulting Detective Comes Full Circle

"Thanks to the telephone and the help of the Yard, I can usually get my essentials without leaving this room."

Early in his career, Holmes saw his profession with a somewhat Mycroftian view. Clients would bring him their problems, and using his great knowledge of crime, Holmes hoped to advise them without ever leaving his consulting room. As technology advanced, his original thought of simply consulting seems to become more real.

Could Holmes have worked in the modern day without ever leaving his sitting room? Might his retirement to Sussex been simply a ruse to cover long-distance work by telephone?

8. The Madonna Of The Victorian World

"Carina sings to-night at the Albert Hall, and we still have time to dress, dine, and enjoy."

What do we know about this single-named "Carina"? What sort of thing would she have sung at Albert Hall? Any chance she was not a person, but the 1888 comic opera "Carina" written by one Julia Woolf?

9. The Source Of The Telegram

"Dispatched at 2:10 from Little Purlington," Holmes says of the telegram we later find to be bogus. Did Sherlock have to go all the way to Little Purlington to send his phony telegram? Or could he have arranged the matter locally?

10. Amberly's Attack Of The Air

At the case's climax, Holmes confronts Amberly with the question, "What did you do with the bodies?"

Amberley then acts most peculiarly: "The man sprang to his feet with a hoarse scream. He clawed into the air with his bony hands."

Why that reaction? Was he outraged by the accusation and clawing at Holmes? Was he having a sitcom-style, Fred Sanford, over-dramatized fake heart attack?

11. The Ominous White Pellet

When confronted with his crime, Josiah Amberly also pops a white pill, which Holmes immediately jostles lose by twisting Amberly's head to face the ground (by placing his hands on Amberly's throat, no less). Was that anything close to a real method for getting a pill out of someone?

Could the pill have been something other than poison, like some stress remedy? And if it was poison, what would Amberly have been most likely to be using to escape justice?

12. And Why Do We Have These Laws . . . ?

Holmes tells the Scotland Yard inspector, "You, for example, with your compulsory warning about whatever he said being used against him, could never have bluffed this rascal into what is virtually a confession."

If the police couldn't bluff Amberly into a confession, what validity would Holmes's use of that tactic have in a court of law? And what was Holmes's "virtual confession"? Amberly taking a pill?

And if that wasn't enough, next Holmes himself confesses to burglary in front of Inspector MacKinnon -- and a full, true confession at that. This case surely wouldn't have stood up in court today. Would it have worked at the turn of that earlier century?

13. The Irregularities Of Mr. Barker

"He has several good cases to his credit, has he not, Inspector?" Holmes says of Barker.

"He has certainly interfered several times," the inspector replies..

"His methods are irregular, no doubt, like my own," Holmes suggests, seeming not to be too sure of what Barker's methods are. What might Barker's irregular methods have been, and how might he have been interfering with police investigations? All we see of him in this tale is that he watches Amberly's house until he sees someone sneaking out of it, which doesn't seem much of a method at all. Why did he suspect Amberly to begin with, instead of trying to track the runaway couple?

14. Covering The Smell Of Gas

Okay, for starters, natural gas has no smell except for the scent added to alert people to its presence in the air, correct? Was the same scent added in Victorian Lewisham as today? How hard was it to get out of a small room that took only two minutes to asphyxiate someone in? Was Amberly's supposed painting ruse even necessary, especially as he didn't paint over the one place he might have wanted to -- the "We we --" in indelible pencil?

15. The Clue Nobody Seems To Have Noticed

The paper says, "the subsequent inquiry which led to the discovery of the bodies in a disused well, cleverly concealed by a dog-kennel."

If merely painting a room was suspicious, why was it that no one fussed over the new dog kennel? Did Amberly, a miser who didn't even care for his yard, have a dog? Or was the kennel there from previous owners, in which case one must wonder how Amberly even knew of the well.

16. The Question Of Motive

While the motive for Amberly's supposed crime seems obvious enough, what I have to wonder is what Holmes and Barker's motives might have been for a possible framing of the retired colourman. Given all the questionable tactics, railroading, and general tomfoolery involved in this case, can one not help but wonder if Amberly had been set up. Is there any scenario wherein the former colourman might have been innocent? Could this have been what made the case "the debate of all England" a week later?

17. The Keeper Of The Archives

"You can file it in our archives, Watson," Holmes tells the doctor. "Some day the true story may be told."

Is Watson acting more like Holmes's secretary in the later tales than he did early on? Have the individual records and mementos of the two men merged by this time?

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8. View Halloas (Rosemary Michaud)

I remember well the first time I read this story. I was in that first wave of Sherlockian enthusiasm: the one that impels the incipient Sherlockian to run out and buy the Doubleday complete and read it from cover to cover. As I turned my eyes to page 1113, I remember thinking with sadness that this was the last of the first readings. Never again would I be able to read a new Sherlock Holmes story for the first time! In spite of its limitations, I treasured it then, and I treasure it now. It may be mediocre compared to some of the other Holmes tales, and yet it's not "devoid of interest and even of instruction." In a moment, I'll stop daydreaming about Watson's "natural advantages" and send out the Comments and Questions to introduce this week's story of "The Retired Colourman."

Chess curious: Who won most of the chess games between Amberley and Ernest? If Amberley was used to being the chess master and young Doctor Ernest took him to school, might that be enough to send the old crank over the murderous edge? Would it at least have been enough to start Amberley wondering if Ernest wasn't also winning a few matches with his wife?

Was Mrs. Amberley actually fooling around? Is it possible that she really did have a headache that night she didn't go to the theatre? Did Amberley give her something at dinner to ensure that she would not feel well enough to go? Did he deliberately buy tickets to a play that he knew she would not want to attend?

Holmes's "pathetic and futile" speech is rather moving, and when we get to know Josiah Amberley better, he seems far too despicable a toad to inspire such empathy or compassion. What might have been the reason that Amberley's case elicited such an unusual expression of feeling from Holmes?

Did Amberley come to Holmes because he wanted to get caught? Or did Amberley go to Holmes mainly because he found out that Dr. Ernest's family had gone to Barker, and Amberley actually thought that Holmes would help him disprove anything Barker uncovered?

The limb of the law: Watson says that the case became "the eager debate of all England." A double murder is certainly sensational, but what was there to debate about?

Why did Holmes go to such great lengths to mention all the ladies that Watson could have charmed for information, only to tell him that the information had already been gathered by telephone? Was Holmes ever quite satisfied with the way Watson handled things when he sent him out alone? The one exception I can think of was The Hound of the Baskervilles, but was Holmes really satisfied in that case, or did Watson just put him on the defensive with his "You use me and do not trust me!" tirade?

Were there ever any "Coptic Patriarchs," or did Holmes just invent them because he didn't feel like getting involved in Amberley's dreary case? If so, what changed his mind?

Holmes called Inspector McKinnon "a good fellow." Was this a compliment to his personality or to his talents as a detective? If the latter, was Scotland Yard getting smarter or was Holmes mellowing? Did Holmes know that McKinnon had his own suspicions about Amberley?

Was Amberley's conviction a certainty?

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9. Delicate Questions (Chris Redmond, BSI)

This tale has an atmosphere of old age, retirement, sadness and decay; it also has one of the best shocking lines in all the Holmes tales, and a thoroughly appropriate final sentence.

Nevertheless, is it a strong enough story to occupy the crucial last place in the Canon?

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10. Additional Thoughts (Steve Clarkson)

Josiah Amberley cut a pathetic figure. He had worked hard all his life, saved enough to allow him to retire with a comfortable income, bought a house, and taken a pretty younger wife to share his retirement years. Yet in one stroke of misfortune he lost all this; his wife had run off with a young doctor, taking his hard-earned savings with her. The police were unable to locate the wife and her lover, so Amberley turned to Sherlock Holmes for help. Little did he know what form that "help" would take.

This case is one of at least three that involves death by suffocation: MUSG and GREE are two others. (There is a possibility that the deadly fumes of radix pedis diaboli in DEVI would cause that case to fall into this category as well.) In any event, I was struck by the invocation of "the old Italian spirit" as exemplary of the mindset of Josiah Amberley. I recall that Isadora Klein referred to the writings of the hapless Douglas Maberley in those terms as well. Could this be a reference to cruel machinations of the sort practiced by Niccolo Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia?

Josiah Amberley is one of the five one-legged men to appear (there are six mentioned, but only five appear) in the Canon. One wonders why Doyle chose to make him an amputee; perhaps it was an effort to make him appear even more pathetic than Watson perceived him to be upon their first encounter. Evidently, the leg was inflexible ("Left shoe wrinkled, right one smooth") and little better than the "timber-toe" worn by Jonathan Small in SIGN. Amberley must have experienced considerable difficulty in negotiating the 17 steps at 221 Baker Street, and the journey to Mossmoor ("Moosmoor" in Doubleday) cum Little Purlington must have been a peculiarly trying exercise for him. It is odd that his intact leg was "spindly" since, as Holmes remarked in TWIS, "weakness in one limb is often compensated by exceptional strength in another." In any case, his prosthesis must have given him an awkward gait which somehow went unnoticed by Watson's medical eye. And, considering his handicap, how was he able to "spring to his feet" when confronted by Holmes and Barker?

Did the gas laid in for illumination at the time of this story have a distinctive odour? If it had, would it not have dissipated in a short time had the doors and windows been opened? But there are other questions: How did Amberley rid the sealed "strong-room" of the fumes before entering to dispose of the bodies of his victims? Wasn't there a chance that his nosey neighbours would notice the smell of gas when the room was ventilated? And was there not a considerable risk of explosion in using this highly combustible gas?

How did the management of the Haymarket Theatre know that neither seat B30 nor 32 of the upper circle had been occupied on the night in question? Was it customary for theatres to perform such a census, and if so, for what purpose? Of course, the theatre operators may well have saved the ticket stubs to verify them against the "gate" for that evening, but once that was done, would they not have discarded the stubs? Would they have been able to tell a week later whether or not a certain seat had been occupied?

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11. Questions & Comments (Sonia Fetherston, BSI)

There's a house with an overgrown garden…and a mighty unusual variety of roses! Our new story, of course, is The Adventure of the Retired Colourman. My questions and comments for this sinister tale:

She presumably volunteered to marry the old, pathetic, futile, miserable miser. She acquiesced to life in the slatternly house. She may have been an adultress. Not the most inspiring of characters, "and yet! — and yet!" why is it still possible to sympathize with Mrs. Amberley?

Does the game of chess have any actual bearing on the story?

Barker seems to be a pretty darned good detective. Is Holmes serious, or joking, when he says Barker is his "hated rival?"

"We we–" is a fairly thin indictment, though it's the best Dr. Ernest could do under the circumstances. Is it strong enough evidence to lay before a jury, or even before the Broadmoor commitment board?

Josiah Amberley lived at a time when retirement wasn't a universal practice. In those days, before old age pensions and social security, and when lifespans were shorter than we now enjoy, people could, and did, work until the day they died. There are precious few other retired persons in the canon. Irene Adler is said to be one, in the sense that she was retired from the operatic stage. Ferguson, the sea captain, retired to Three Gables before Mrs. Maberley took up residence there. Sherlock Holmes, of course, retired to Sussex at the end of his detective career.

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12. 56 Stories in 56 Days (Charlotte Anne Walters)

Well, that's it, I've made it to the end, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

This is the 56th story and signals the end of my epic blog-a-thon. What an adventure it has been! Re-visiting the stories has been very enjoyable and being able to share my thoughts on them with people all around the world has remained an exhilarating experience. For all those of you who have stuck with me since the start, a massive "thank you" from me. In a strange way, I shall miss doing this every day. On the other hand, I won't miss getting up at 5.30 am to start reading and writing before setting off for work.

Anyway, my journey ends with this fun little story about a miserly old man who murders his attractive young wife and her lover then tries to make it look like they have robbed him and run away. He traps them in an air-tight room and gasses them to death, then starts painting the house to disguise the smell and ditches the bodies down a well. Okay, doesn't exactly sound like a 'fun' story I admit, but Doyle has a way of telling things like this which make them seem more like a dark comedy than a disturbing thriller. Things are played to extremes and this stops the story from being too real, too serious. As I have said before, there is much humour in the short stories for which I don't think Doyle gets enough credit.

Am I the only one who thought a colourman was someone military? For those of you who might have made the same mistake, a colourman is someone who manufactures artistic materials such as paint-boxes.

The story begins with Holmes in a melancholy mood; "But is not all life pathetic and futile? Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? We reach, we grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow-misery." Blimey, someone got out of bed the wrong side.

The colourman is so confident that he will get away with his crimes that he enlists Holmes to track down his wife and lover, even though he took their lives himself. Holmes is too busy to investigate at first and sends Watson in his place. As with Watson's efforts in the search for Lady Carfax, Holmes is very dismissive of his findings – "It is true that in your mission you have missed everything of importance," but this time he does throw in lots of positive comments too. However, Watson's rather poetic and detailed description of the wall around the colourman's house is cut short with a bad tempered remark – "Cut out the poetry Watson," followed by, "I note that it was a high brick wall." Poor Watson, he really is the most patient of men.

My modern-day mind couldn't help but laugh (out loud on the train – rather embarrassing) when Holmes suggests that Watson could have used his natural charms to entice information from local women and adds – "I can picture you whispering soft nothings with the young lady at the Blue Anchor, and receiving hard somethings in exchange." Brilliant, priceless dialogue – possibly even funnier than the classic, "I'll just go and put my slippers on", line in the Blue Carbuncle.

The police inspector working on the case, Mackinnon, does make the point to Holmes that he is able to get results in part because he can get away with doing things which the officials can't. The point has been made before and is very true, even though Holmes is undeniably brilliant and his fantastic mind is what ultimately brings about the resolutions, being able to break into people's houses, wearing disguises, duping people into leaving their homes unattended, getting engaged to the villain's maid etc are certainly a massive part of his armoury.

In this story, Holmes yet again breaks into a house in order to solve the case. We forgive him, of course, because the ends always justify the means but these tactics are beyond the reach of the official police. But then, they cannot complain as Holmes is always happy to step aside and let them take all the credit which is confirmed at the end of this story when Watson reads out a newspaper article praising MacKinnon for his 'Bold deduction' and lists points which Holmes actually hit on, not the inspector. Mackinnon takes the praise and glory but Holmes has the satisfaction of knowing that, as always, he has succeeded where others failed, bringing light into the darkness.

What a fine example to end on, a story that contains all I love about Holmes. The brilliant observation and deduction, the interplay with Watson, the humour and darkness skilfully blended together by a writer who I have always felt has not achieved the credit deserved in the history of English literature. Commercial success yes, one of the best loved characters ever written yes, but recognition as a literary great akin to Dickens at al – no. Even Doyle's home, Undershaw, is under threat because the powers -that-be don't see fit to preserve it.

There is a campaign to save Undershaw which you can follow on Facebook, just search for The Undershaw Preservation Trust.

Incidentally, another worthy cause which I'd like to mention is the campaign to award Jeremy Brett a posthumous BAFTA – he really brought Holmes alive on screen for me, better than anyone else in my opinion and his highly successful career has not received the recognition it deserved.

Well, this little mission of mine has reminded me of not only what a great character Holmes was but also taught me to appreciate the stories as a whole and how beautifully crafted they were. I certainly will miss talking about them every day.

I give the Retired Colourman 9 out of 10.

13. Observance of Trifles (Brian Keith Snell)

The Adventure Of The Retired Colourman is not a bad set-up for a story.

But in too many ways, it doesn't go *beyond* the set-up, the basic sketch. The story has a few good things going for it, but it feels like there a lot of details missing, a lot of necessary connective tissue to make us *care* about the mystery.

Take, for example, our victims. Let's start with the wife, uh...*umm*...well....she's never even *named* in the story!!

That's not all that unusual for **Doyle**--he has a bad habit of not naming wives, sometimes, as if they're just adjuncts of their husbands. The era, and sexism, and all.

But in this case, it's also indicative that after Sir Arthur came up with the killer and how he did it, the rest of the backstory was too much to be bothered with.

What of **Mrs. Amberley**, then? We're told that **Josiah** retired at 61, and one year later married "a woman twenty years younger than himself." So she's presumably in her forties. Why does a woman like woman marry a man like Josiah? Did she have no idea what an *abusive miser* he was? Did he somehow manage to fool her? He certainly, as Holmes said, "*has few outward graces, whatever his inner virtues may be.*" Or was this a marriage of *convenience*? Perhaps she was recently widowed, with no means of support, and any port in a storm? Maybe he promised to take care of her family's debts if she married him?

Without understanding why she married him, and what the basis of their relationship was, it's hard to judge the state of their marriage, and whether she was likely to have had an affair. Remember, *everything* we know about Mrs. Amberley comes to us third hand. Perhaps most importantly, it comes to us through a mind so *unbalanced* that **Holmes** believes he may belong in an asylum and not the gallows.

Despite this, Holmes seems to accept *all* of Josiah's accusations at face value. *"Ernest was frequently in the house, and an intimacy between him and Mrs. Amberley was a natural sequence"? "So also is it that young Dr. Ernest, an unmarried man, played chess with Amberley, and probably played the fool with his wife."?* Given what we know of Josiah after the case is over, isn't it just as likely that either he is lying, or it is all in his paranoid imagination?

Not that it necessarily matters--even if she was having an affair, that hardly justifies her murder, particularly in such a gruesome fashion. But without victim-shaming, it is *important* to know what drove the killer. Was she fooling around with **Dr. Ernest**, or was Josiah just foolishly jealous over nothing? A cold-blooded murderer, or truly insane?

The same applies to Dr. Ernest. What do we know about him? *He plays chess*. End of story.

We're told that Josiah *"made his wife so wretched by his niggardly ways that she was a ready prey for any adventurer*." An adventurer? A doctor who goes to play Josiah at chess--at Josiah's invitation--qualifies as *"an adventurer?*"

How about Ernest's looks? Age? Type of doctor? Disposition? Any history of wooing wedded women (and fleeing with her husband's fortune)? As Holmes asked, "*Was he the gay Lothario one would expect?*" Again, there is no actual evidence shown to confirm Amberley's accusations. Holmes claims that *"the opinion of the neighbours"* is enough to "*confirm*" Josiah's story, but come now--that's also getting your story third or fourth-hand. The detective is willing to put local gossip above actual evidence? *Pshaw*. Even after Amberley has been caught, and Holmes declaims on the level of his madness, he is still willing to declare "*so also is it that young Dr. Ernest, an unmarried man, played chess with Amberley, and probably played the fool with his wife*." That is truly unsupported by *anything* except the claims of a murdering madman and local gossips. We expect Holmes to make such declarations based on actual evidence.

Oh, and Dr. Ernest's family was willing to hire a detective to investigate his disappearance, which is at least *one* indication that those close to Ernest didn't believe Josiah's calumny. (There's no indication that Mrs. Amberly's family did the same, but then again, we don't know anything whatsoever about her, including whether she had family).

And it should be emphasized--even *if* we believed that Ernest and Mrs. Amberly were having an affair, there is even *less* evidence that they planned to abscond with any money or securities.

Holmes often proclaims that he seeks justice--well, in this case, he should have spent some time securing justify for the *slandered victims* of an insane murderer.

Some of these details could have been--should have been--explored. It would have been easy to make the story a bit longer (it is *very* short), or if necessary, to spend less time on **Watson** and Amberley's amusing but overly-long trip to the hinterlands.

But without this information, how can we understand the murderer? What about Josiah? Was he truly justified in his fears of an affair? Again, not that that would excuse homicide--but it would broaden our portrait of the character. Had he been married previously, and cuckolded before? If his jealousy could reach the point of a "frantic mania," why invite Ernest into his home? Was he, in his madness, trying to "*test*" her loyalty?

There are also some inconsistencies in Sir Arthur's portrayal of Josiah. He is such a *good actor* that he completely fools Watson and Holmes on his first visit. But later, he does nothing but complain about following any investigative path, when an innocent victim would have been eager to follow up any such "clues." He has the "*swank*" (we Americans would say "*balls*") to beard the lion in his den, and go to Sherlock Holmes to "solve" his wife's "disappearance." But the first time that someone mentions that he's a suspect, he tries to commit suicide? Someone so arrogant as to think he could best Holmes wouldn't be carrying around cyanide pills, because he wouldn't be able to conceive of being caught--at least that's how my armchair psychology reads it.

So we have a chilling murder, and an interesting (if confusing) murderer. But by completely ignoring the victims, and not properly examining the truth of the killer's claim, Doyle weakened leaves some of the *colours* out of this mystery's palette. It's an incomplete picture, which does disservice to the victims (and the readers), and ultimately makes the murderer himself less interesting.

OTHER TRIFLES AND OBSERVATIONS:

**Welcome back, John Watson. You've been missed!!

**Geez, Sherlock, cheer up a bit! "*Exactly, Watson. Pathetic and futile. But is not all life pathetic and futile? Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow -- misery.*"

Sounds like someone needs some drugs...

Scotland Yard has a habit of foisting of low priority cases upon Holmes?

He has been sent on by the Yard. Just as medical men occasionally send their incurables to a quack. They argue that they can do nothing more, and that whatever happens the patient can be no worse than he is.

So how, then, can they complain about Holmes "*stealing the glory*" and taking credit for cases?

**Amberley must have been a pretty good actor, as Holmes seems to be taking his claims at face value: "*The old story, Watson. A treacherous friend and a fickle wife.*"

The ***real* crime? "*What is more, the faithless spouse carried off the old man's deed-box as her personal luggage with a good part of his life's savings within.*" Mess with his heart, but not his money!

Contrast with **Three Gables**, where Holmes says more and more people are using banks now, and not hiding their money on the premises.

I guess that didn't apply to *paranoid misers...*

**It's good to be needed:

"What will you do about it?"

"Well, the immediate question, my dear Watson, happens to be, What will you do? -- if you will be good enough to understudy me.

**Apocryphal case: "You know that I am preoccupied with this case of the two Coptic Patriarchs, which should come to a head to-day. I really have not time to go out to Lewisham,"

**Swank: "*The old fellow was quite insistent that I should go.*" Just think about that. Amberley was so confident that he actually *wanted* Sherlock Holmes to examine the scene of the crime.

**Watson: "*I set forth to Lewisham, little dreaming that within a week the affair in which I was engaging would be the eager debate of all England.*"

What's to debate? I suppose whether Amberley gets a straight jacket or the noose...

**See, *this* is why we missed Watson:

Holmes lay with his gaunt figure stretched in his deep chair, his pipe curling forth slow wreaths of acrid tobacco, while his eyelids drooped over his eyes so lazily that he might almost have been asleep were it not that at any halt or questionable passage of my narrative they half lifted, and two gray eyes, as bright and keen as rapiers, transfixed me with their searching glance.

There's no way we would have gotten that same kind of self-description from Holmes as narrator...

**"*The Haven is the name of Mr. Josiah Amberley's house.*"

I really think I missed out, growing up in an era where houses have *numbers*, not names. Or was that only a British thing? Do they still do that?

Maybe I'll just rechristen my apartment. From henceforth, I shall call my domicile "The Glade." Now I just have to explain it to the mailman...

**Holmes is *not* of fan of having to listen to Watson's detailed descriptions of architecture:

"I think it would interest you, Holmes. It is like some penurious patrician who has sunk into the company of his inferiors. You know that particular quarter, the monotonous brick streets, the weary suburban highways. Right in the middle of them, a little island of ancient culture and comfort, lies this old home, surrounded by a high sun-baked wall mottled with lichens and topped with moss, the sort of wall --"

"Cut out the poetry, Watson," said Holmes severely. "I note that it was a high brick wall."

**Our mysterious stalker is first seen:

He was a tall, dark, heavily moustached, rather military-looking man. He nodded in answer to my inquiry and gave me a curiously questioning glance, which came back to my memory a little later...It was undoubtedly the tall, dark man whom I had addressed in the street. I saw him once more at London Bridge, and then I lost him in the crowd. But I am convinced that he was following me."

"No doubt! No doubt!" said Holmes. "A tall, dark, heavily moustached man, you say, with gray-tinted sun-glasses?"

"Holmes, you are a wizard. I did not say so, but he had gray-tinted sun-glasses."

"And a Masonic tie-pin?"

"Holmes!"

Some have complained that it would a violation of rules for a Mason to wear his pin where it could be seen by the public. But if that were true, how would anyone outside of the group ever *know* what the pin looked like in the first place?

More seriously, that's part of the disguise, the superfluous detail that, while perhaps not strictly accurate, distracts the witness...

There seems to be a lot of confusion among commentators about **Barker, and that Holmes' statements seem to contradict themselves.

Nonsense. Although we not presented the information on Barker in a proper chronological order, so the reader has to do a little bit of lifting for himself, it's all their, and not contradictory.. Allow me to help.

Holmes: *"You had not met Barker, Watson. He is my hated rival upon the Surrey shore."* The "hated rival" is a bit *facetious*, as Sherlock later describes Mr. Barker as "*my friend and rival*." He's been successful, and Scotland Yard is well acquainted with him: "*He has several good cases to his credit, has he not, Inspector?"*

Ernest's family hired Barker to look into the doctor's disappearance, so he and Holmes were on the same case, just from different ends: "*He has been interesting himself also in your business, Mr. Josiah Amberley, though we have been working independently*."

Once they stumbled upon each other, "*Of course, I told him how matters stood and we continued the case together."*

So when Holmes says, "*as to Barker, he has done nothing save what I told him*," he's referring to the conduct *of this particular case*, not his entire career.

Barker is a friendly rival detective, they both ended up working the same case, and this one time they decided to pool their efforts. No confusion at all, really.

There, was that so hard?

**Wait, so Barker operated "*upon the Surrey shore?*" Is he still there when Holmes retires? Does he consult Holmes on cases?

Or, with the vacuum from Holmes' retirement, has Barker moved his operation to London?

**Watson (and Doyle) continue to adhere to the "moral deformity must be echoed by physical deformity" school of literature:

"He seemed to me like a man who was literally bowed down by care. His back was curved as though he carried a

heavy burden. Yet he was not the weakling that I had at first imagined, for his shoulders and chest have the framework of a giant, though his figure tapers away into a pair of spindled legs."

"Left shoe wrinkled, right one smooth."

"I did not observe that."

"No, you wouldn't. I spotted his artificial limb. But proceed."

Seriously, how could he *not* be a bad guy?

**Watson's thought on the role of Victorian women:

I have never seen a worse-kept place. The garden was all running to seed, giving me an impression of wild neglect in which the plants had been allowed to find the way of Nature rather than of art. How any decent woman could have tolerated such a state of things, I don't know.

Of course, how a "*decent woman*" is expected to an estate in good repair when her husband is a miser might be the question you *should* be asking, John.

Of course, deeper commentary about how decent women not allowing plants *"to find the way of Nature"* and the metaphor of "nature" being a bad thing is invited here, but I'll leave that to others.

**The husband doth protest too much, methinks:

And human nature, Dr. Watson -- the black ingratitude of it all! When did I ever refuse one of her requests? Was ever a woman so pampered? And that young man -- he might have been my own son. He had the run of my house. And yet see how they have treated me! Oh, Dr. Watson, it is a dreadful, dreadful world!'

Well, at least he didn't go on about it forever..."*That was the burden of his song for an hour or more...*" Oh.

**Holmes tempers his usual criticism of Watson:

It is true that though in your mission you have missed everything of importance, yet even those things which have obtruded themselves upon your notice give rise to serious thought."

"What have I missed?"

"Don't be hurt, my dear fellow. You know that I am quite impersonal. No one else would have done better. Some possibly not so well."

High praise from Sherlock.

**Holmes has adjusted quite well to the existence of telephones: "*Thanks to the telephone and the help of the Yard, I can usually get my essentials without leaving this room.*"

Wait until he sees the internet...

**Amberley begins to break character:

"It's perfectly absurd, Mr. Holmes," he said. "What can this man possibly know of what has occurred? It is waste of time and money."

"It would make the worst possible impression both on the police and upon myself, Mr. Amberley, if when so obvious a clue arose you should refuse to follow it up. We should feel that you were not really in earnest in this investigation."

Our client seemed horrified at the suggestion. "Why, of course I shall go if you look at it in that way," said he.

Obviously, the man who *really* wanted to find his wife (and his money) wouldn't turn up his nose at a clue like this.

The **BBC 1965** adaptation sweetens the pot here , by telling us that Mrs. Amberley had a sister in the area of **Little Purlington**, thus making a communication from the area vicar not completely random and unlikely...

**Obviously, at this point Holmes is fairly convinced Amberley is guilty: "*Whatever you do, see that he really does go," said he. "Should he break away or return, get to the nearest telephone exchange and send the single word 'Bolted.' I will arrange here that it shall reach me wherever I am."*

Of course, it's difficult to believe that this direction doesn't tell *Watson* what the game is. Let's just write that up to authorial discretion, and trying to preserve the mystery until the end of the story.

Watson's road trip from **:

My remembrance of the journey is not a pleasant one, for the weather was hot, the train slow, and my companion sullen and silent, hardly talking at all save to make an occasional sardonic remark as to the futility of our proceedings. When we at last reached the little station it was a two-mile drive before we came to the Vicarage.

Holmes was surely laughing at how perfectly remote his choice of ruse was.

**__Elman the Vicar__ is rather a douche:

A big, solemn, rather pompous clergyman received us in his study. Our telegram lay before him.

"Well, gentlemen," he asked, "what can I do for you?"

"We came," I explained, "in answer to your wire."

"My wire! I sent no wire."

"I mean the wire which you sent to Mr. Josiah Amberley about his wife and his money."

"If this is a joke, sir, it is a very questionable one," said the vicar angrily. "I have never heard of the gentleman you name, and I have not sent a wire to anyone."

Our client and I looked at each other in amazement. "Perhaps there is some mistake," said I; "are there perhaps two vicarages? Here is the wire itself, signed Elman and dated from the Vicarage."

"There is only one vicarage, sir, and only one vicar, and this wire is a scandalous forgery, the origin of which shall certainly be investigated by the police. Meanwhile, I can see no possible object in prolonging this interview."

What a *self-important prig*. Sure it's an inconvenience, this mistaken meeting, but what would it cost you to be polite to people come to seek your aid? Some man of God...

**By the way...would a forged telegram *really* be a police matter, as long as there was no attempt at defrauding someone of money or property?

**Miser: *"It was soon apparent to me that my companion's reputation as a miser was not undeserved. He had grumbled at the expense of the journey, had insisted upon travelling third-class, and was now clamorous in his objections to the hotel bill."*

**The big reveal:

But we both have the same question to ask you!"

Mr. Amberley sat down heavily. He sensed impending danger. I read it in his straining eyes and his twitching features. "What is the question, Mr. Holmes?"

"Only this: What did you do with the bodies?

**Great moments in over-acting:

The man sprang to his feet with a hoarse scream. He clawed into the air with his bony hands. His mouth was open, and for the instant he looked like some horrible bird of prey. In a flash we got a glimpse of the real Josiah Amberley, a misshapen demon with a soul as distorted as his body.

Seriously, he was a good enough actor to convince Holmes (initially) of the truth of his story. But at the first word of doubt he *completely loses it*?

**I mentioned this above, but it bears repeating:

As he fell back into his chair he clapped his hand to his lips as if to stifle a cough. Holmes sprang at his throat like a tiger and twisted his face towards the ground. A white pellet fell from between his gasping lips.

"No short cuts, Josiah Amberley. Things must be done decently and in order."

Someone as arrogant and calculating as Amberley just doesn't strike me as the type who would throw in the towel at the first doubting word. That kind never believes they could lose, so they never prepare for defeat. Holmes described him as "*He felt so clever and so sure of himself that he imagined no one could touch him*." That doesn't seem like someone who would end his own life at the first setback.

I could see suicide *later*, in his cell. But to carry around a pill means planning to be caught, and that's not how I read Josiah. Then again, crazy is crazy, so...?

Not to mention, Holmes has not yet presented a *single* piece of evidence against him. He just says, essentially, "I think you did it." And Josiah immediately gives up?

**Holmes being a bit cavalier about civil rights and the like:

The irregulars are useful sometimes, you know. You, for example, with your compulsory warning about whatever he said being used against him, could never have bluffed this rascal into what is virtually a confession.

Which is why the courts often take a dim view of "*irregulars*" doing work for the police, often at their behest.

**So, is an alleged suicide attempt "*virtually a confession*"? Again, remember no one official witnessed this, just the "irregulars." And if Amberley *is* mentally ill, then any attempt at self-harm could have multiple meanings besides an admission of guilt.

Fortunately, the bodies were found, and the ersatz gas chamber, so it's rather a moot point. Still, "*bluffing*" rascals into attempting suicide doesn't have a ton of evidentiary value, if you ask me.

**__Inspector MacKinnon__: "*You will excuse us for feeling sore when you jump in with methods which we cannot use, and so rob us of the credit.*"

But ***you*** sent him to Holmes!!

In fairness, it quite likely wasn't MacKinnon himself who sent Amberley to Holmes. Still, you're surely not allowed to complain when you pass of loser cases to civilians and they go and solve them for you. You clearly made *yourself* look bad in that case.

**Rather a broad defamation: "*Amberley excelled at chess -- one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind.*"

Really?

Of course, Ernest played chess, *too*--was he a schemer? Should police haunt chess clubs, looking for potential master criminals and murderers?

**Paint, obviously, was way stinkier back in the day.

**Josiah's alibi was *pretty terrible*, as it was so easily checked: "I had examined the box-office chart at the Haymarket Theatre -- another of Dr. Watson's bull's-eyes -- and ascertained that neither B thirty nor thirty-two of the upper circle had been occupied that night."

**Holmes again boasting of his criminal prowess: "*Burglary has always been an alternative profession had I cared to adopt it, and I have little doubt that I should have come to the front*."

**The death chamber:

You see the gas-pipe along the skirting here. Very good. It rises in the angle of the wall, and there is a tap here in the corner. The pipe runs out into the strong-room, as you can see, and ends in that plaster rose in the centre of the ceiling, where it is concealed by the ornamentation. That end is wide open.

Many have asked how long it took to fashion this gas chamber; how it was done without the wife or servant noticing; and what that tells us about how long Josiah had been planning this double homicide.

The BBC 1965 clarifies (or perhaps *retcons*) this, having Holmes explain that the gas line was pre-existing, running to lighting in the room. Amberley had removed the light fixture, and removed the shut off knob on the gas line. So no expensive and time-consuming alterations needed...

**The dying words:

'We we --' That's all. "What do you make of that?" "Well, it's only a foot above the ground. The poor devil was on the floor dying when he wrote it. He lost his senses before he could finish." "He was writing, 'We were murdered.' "

Talk about *confirmation bias!* Couldn't it just as well have been a confession--"We were having an affair"? "We were guilty, so we decided to kill ourselves"??

**Sherlock's diagnosis of Josiah:

But, first, I would give you an insight into this man's mentality. It is a very unusual one -- so much so that I think his destination is more likely to be Broadmoor than the scaffold. He has, to a high degree, the sort of mind which one associates with the mediaeval Italian nature rather than with the modern Briton... Like all misers, he was a jealous man, and his jealousy became a frantic mania.

Or, just a murdering *******.