



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure IV -- The Red-Headed League

On a personal level, re-reading this story brings me some relief on two particular points involving my own novel, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

Firstly, I decided to write that Watson lived in Kensington as I remembered this to be so in the original stories but couldn't for the life of me remember in which story I had read it. I looked though my well-thumbed Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes many times but could not find the Kensington reference. Eventually I simply decided to take a risk and stuck with it regardless. So I was very pleased to see that it is in the Red Headed League that Watson makes reference to his house in Kensington, meaning that I did get it right after all.

Another point of detail which caused me angst was the furniture issue – what did people sit on in Victorian England? I couldn't keep putting everyone in arm chairs and fireside chairs but obviously no-one would sit on the sofa. I therefore took a risk that settee would be an acceptable alternative, even though my husband thought this was still too modern a name. So when Watson uses the word settee himself on the opening page of The League, I couldn't help but raise a satisfied smile.

At the beginning of the narrative, Holmes rather touchingly refers to Watson as his partner and helper when describing him to Mr Wilson, which is a big improvement on simply biographer. It acknowledges the active role Watson plays in the adventures and the word partner even infers an equal status to Holmes which is very interesting.

Watson lives up to this description by bravely accompanying Holmes, Jones and the bank director into the cellar of the bank despite Holmes making it clear danger will be involved and an army revolver required.



In the Granada series, the RHL is one of my favourite episodes containing a great performance from Richard Wilson (pre Victor Meldrew) as Duncan Ross and Tim McInnerny as John Clay. I seem to recall that the TV dramatisation makes more of the bank director's scepticism at Holmes' suggestion the gold is to be stolen and it is, of course, always most enjoyable when Holmes proves his doubters wrong.

The story contains much humour and is very clever in its conception. Also, more light is shed upon the workings of Holmes' mind when Watson states – 'The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy,' further suggesting, arguably, a mental instability.

Finally, there is mention of a vegetarian restaurant and I had no idea such a concept existed in Victorian England. There I was fretting about settees being too modern but the folk of late nineteenth century London were actually popping out for hummus and falafel on a regular basis. Great stuff!

The Red Headed League scores 7 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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