



## The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

### Adventure XIV -- The Adventure of the Copper Beeches

This story reveals much about the difficult nature of Holmes' personality, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

The Copper Beeches starts with Holmes being very critical of Watson's accounts of his work. And though Watson answers in such a way as to demonstrate his hurt at such comments, Holmes ignores this and continues regardless. Watson admits to being repelled by 'the egotism which I had more than once observed to be a strong factor in my friend's singular character'.

It's more than egotism to me, it's as if Holmes just doesn't notice that he has caused offence, can't read the signs or understand the general pragmatics of conversation which involve listening to the other person and responding appropriately. Watson even states that Holmes responds to his thoughts and not his words. During this interchange, Holmes does however say one of my favourite Holmesian quotes – 'Crime is common. Logic is rare.'

I do think this interchange between them adds weight to the argument that Holmes was mildly autistic. There is another odd hint in this story. The child which Miss Hunter is asked to care for could arguably be seen as having signs of autism – 'He is small for his age, with a head which is quite disproportionately large. His whole life appears to be spent in alternation between savage fits of passion and gloomy intervals of sulking.' Is this a subtle clue from Sir Arthur or am I over-analysing?



But then we come to another scene which fits the argument so well. As Holmes and Watson sit on their train traveling through the beautiful English countryside on an idyllic spring day, Watson comments on the beauty of their surroundings prompting Holmes to give a very revealing insight into the workings of his mind –

‘It is one of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there’. Too much evidence to be ignored in my opinion.

Yet again we are treated to a very literary description of the weather at the beginning of the narrative – ‘A thick fog rolled down between the lines of dun-coloured houses, and the opposing windows loomed like dark, shapeless blurs through the heavy yellow wreaths.’ Sometimes it feels as if Doyle was torn between being a writer of action, dramatic fast-paced tales, or a wordy descriptive writer of higher aspirations.

But now to Miss Violet Hunter and her strange little problem. She comes to see Holmes to take his advice on whether or not she should accept a well-paid position of governess with an eccentric rural family. Holmes is unusually impressed by her manner – ‘I could see that Holmes was favourably impressed by the manner and speech of his new client’.

Later on in the story when Holmes sets Miss Hunter a task, he compliments her further by saying – ‘I should not ask it of you if I did not think you a quite exceptional woman’. Wow, high praise indeed.

Watson expresses his disappointment towards the end of the story that Holmes doesn’t continue with his interest in Miss Hunter once the case is resolved. Clearly he was keen for his friend to show his human side and perhaps form a romantic union. Is the fact that he does not, further proof of autistic tendencies? Or did he just not really fancy her all that much?

As to the plot – well I think it is very far-fetched and I can’t really warm to it. Very interesting for what it reveals (or rather hints) about Holmes but that’s it for me really.

**6 out of 10.**

**Charlotte Anne Walters**

**October 01, 2011**