



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XVIII – The Adventure of the Stockbroker's Clerk

Young Hall Pycroft was out of a job. His former employer, a stock firm named Coxon & Woodhouse, had suffered a grievous loss through an investment in Venezuela and had to let a number of their clerks go as a result. Pycroft pounded the pavement and mailed inquiries to prospective employers until he had run through his savings, with no results. Then just as he was beginning to despair, he received a letter from one of the biggest stock companies in London, Mawson & Williams, hiring him and even naming a salary slightly above what he had been receiving at his previous job.

That very evening, a stranger named Arthur Pinner visited Pycroft at his residence and offered him a job managing a company which would sell English crockery in France. The salary mentioned was an incredible £500 per year, with an overriding commission on sales that would bring him as much more. Flabbergasted but grateful, Pycroft wrote Pinner a note accepting the position. Pinner, in turn, directed Pycroft to present himself the next day to Pinner's brother Harry, who had an office in Birmingham, a town north of London.

Pycroft made his appearance in Birmingham as arranged and was interviewed by Harry Pinner, who bore a strong resemblance to his brother Arthur. So strong was the resemblance, in fact, that Pycroft noticed that each Pinner had the same tooth badly stuffed with a gold filling. Realizing that the two Pinners must be one and the same person, Pycroft sought out Sherlock Holmes to unravel the deception being practiced upon him. Little did he know that the trail would lead to robbery, murder, and attempted suicide.



Watson says that he bought his practice from old Mr. Farquhar and that the practice had declined from a respectable income of £1,200 a year to about £300 a year. How much would Watson have paid Mr. Farquhar for the practice? And where did Watson get the money to buy it?

Holmes observes that Watson bought the better of two practices because Watson's office steps were worn "three inches deeper" than his neighbor's. Both houses were apparently rather old and were built at about the same time and used from that time forward for medical practices. What material were the steps made from? Surely not wood, since it would be unusual, to say the least, to make wooden steps more than three inches thick. Concrete, then, or marble? The secondary inference we can make from Holmes' observation is that Watson's office had nearly always had the "better" practice from the time the building was constructed since it takes many years to wear stone or concrete steps in that fashion. Is this a valid conclusion?

How did "Arthur Pinner" find out that Hall Pycroft was offered the job at Mawson & Williams? For that matter, how did he find out the very same day Pycroft received the letter employing him? And was it reasonable for "Pinner" to expect Pycroft to know the contents of each day's stock exchange list from memory? (Note to our British Hounds: How many stocks might this have encompassed in 1888?) And did Pycroft expect the same mnemonic feat from "Pinner" by expecting him to know the accuracy of the stock quotations Pycroft supplied?

When Holmes, Watson, and Pycroft were discussing the case while "Harry Pinner" was catching his breath, Holmes commented, concerning written employment contracts such as that struck between "Pinner" and Pycroft, "Well, why did they want him to do it? Not as a business matter, for these arrangements are usually verbal..." Is that the way employment was arranged in 1888...on a "handshake" basis?

Watson said of the *Evening Standard* article announcing the robbery at Mawson & Williams, "It appeared from its position in the paper to have been the one event of importance in town..." Did the London newspapers "signal" the relative importance of a news item by placing it in a certain position on the page, and if so, where did they place it?

Would even so prominent a stock-broking firm as Mawson & Williams have had guardianship over securities amounting "in the aggregate to a sum of considerably over a million sterling?" Judging from the comments made while the Hounds were discussing BERY, it would have been unusual to say the least for that to have been the situation.

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