

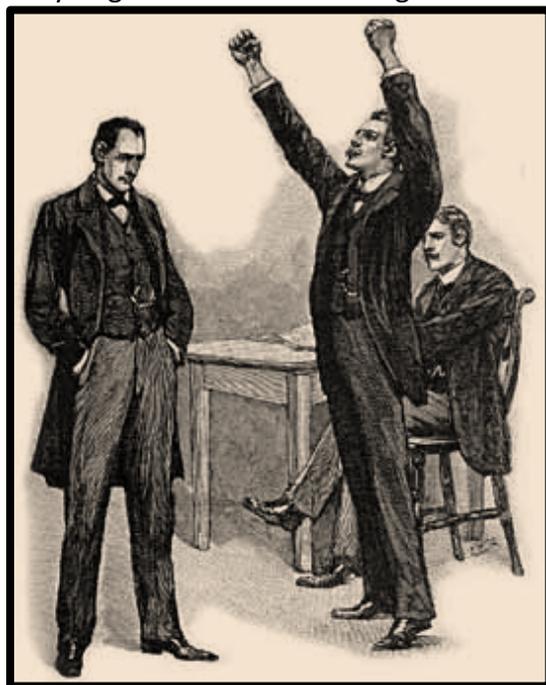


The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XVIII -- The Adventure of the Stockbroker's Clerk

Those of you who were members of the Hounds last year will be familiar with the following information, but I'll repeat it here for the newcomers. Back when the bar known as the Dangling Prussian Amateur Press Association was still open for business, the Hounds' own Colonel Warburton conducted a poll of the patrons therein to discover which of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes could be termed "Most Forgettable." In this scientific, random sampling of Sherlockians (they didn't come much more random than that DPAPA crowd) "The Stockbroker's Clerk" emerged as the clear winner. Other Sherlockians have confirmed these results from their own experience: this tale just doesn't loom very large in the Holmesian legend! But is it really such a bad story, or does it suffer eclipse only because of the obvious comparisons with its cousin in modus operandi, "The Red-Headed League"?

It has all been done before: If we can't help comparing "The Stockbroker's Clerk" to "The Red-Headed League," it's important to remember that "The Stockbroker's Clerk" happened first, and perhaps Holmes needed to learn the lesson from this story in order to triumph so completely in "The Red-Headed League" later on. If nothing else, Holmes must have learned to smoke three pipes over a problem, rather than to spring into action immediately after hearing a client's story. There is one passage in "The Stockbroker's Clerk" that I think is particularly significant in this respect. Holmes, Watson and Pycroft have already boarded the train, and Pycroft has told his story over again. Holmes starts to wonder aloud, "What qualities have you . . . which would make your services so valuable? Or is it possible that -" At this point, Holmes stopped speaking to his companions and spent the rest of the train ride biting his nails and staring out the window. Was that the moment when Holmes saw what was really happening? And if he did figure out what was going on at Mawson's while he was still on



the train, what could or should he have done about it? Of course there is a problem in timing here, isn't there? If Holmes called upon Watson at breakfast, and they dashed out to meet their train, and the train ride took seventy minutes, then how was it that enough time had elapsed for "Pinner" to buy a paper containing news of events that had happened in London early that same afternoon?

Hall Pycroft: In past discussions of this story, various Hounds have commented that although this story is deficient in midnight vigils, vicious animals, and gunplay, it is rich in its portrayal of character of the client. If this was Watson's main reason for publishing the story, what do you imagine he was trying to prove in so doing? Was he trying to exonerate the clerk from the rumors that he had been involved in the crime? What do you think Hall Pycroft's personal and professional life was like after his misadventure, and what do you think eventually happened to him? Do you think that Holmes and Watson would have trusted his investment advice? Would you?

Do the Hounds detect a bit of class snobbery at work in the portrayal of the unfortunate Hall Pycroft? Yes, Watson mentioned that cockneys make good soldiers, athletes, and sportsmen, but was that perhaps a back-handed way of implying that brains weren't expected to be a cockney's strong suit? There's no denying that Pycroft WAS a fool to have given up his job at Mawson's for a quick hundred pounds and a promise that was, as they say, too good to be true. But hearing Pycroft tell his story in his "smart, young city man" argot could make a person think of a brogue-laden "Pat and Mike" skit, or perhaps an episode of "Amos and Andy." Were Victorian readers amused by a tale of an ambitious and bragging young cockney who turned out to be not so clever as he imagined himself to be? Do you think Watson intended any snobbery and ridicule, or was he merely trying for a "Dickensian" touch?

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