



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XIX – The Adventure of the Gloria Scott

Indirectly, this adventure helped point the way to Sherlock Holmes in his career as the greatest consulting detective of all time. And we owe it all to...dare I say it?...a bull terrier that bit Holmes on the ankle. Victor Trevor, the owner of the pugnacious pooch, being remorseful at the damage his pet had wrought, visited Holmes during his recuperation and the two became good friends. The friendship led to an invitation to Holmes to visit the Trevor homestead in The Broads and to meet Victor's father, a Justice of the Peace. Holmes told Watson that it was J.P. Trevor's prophetic words that started him to thinking he could make the art of detection his life's work. "I don't know how you manage this, Mr. Holmes, but it seems to me that all the detectives of fact and fancy would be children in your hands. That's your line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world."

A few weeks after his visit, Holmes received an urgent telegram from his friend Victor requesting him to come once more to the Trevor homestead. Young Trevor met Holmes at the railway station, and on the way to the homestead told Holmes a tale of the evil brought to the household by a small, wizened sailor who had visited during Holmes's earlier stay.

The outcome of the sailor's visit was that Trevor Sr. was left dying from an apoplectic stroke, apparently the consequence of a strange, seemingly meaningless message he had received from a friend whom the sailor had gone to visit. The message actually foretold the revelation of a tale of a convict uprising, murder, and the destruction of a sailing vessel with all hands aboard.



When Holmes visited the Trevor homestead, he noted, among other things, “...a small but select library, taken over, as I understood, from a former tenant...” A little further on, he mentions that the senior Trevor “...knew hardly any books.” Two questions: Why did Trevor take over the small but select library if he was not a bookish man; and why did the former tenant relinquish the library?

Holmes noticed that the elder Trevor had the initials “J.A.” tattooed in the bend of his elbow. Presumably, this was the inside of the elbow joint. But isn’t that a very peculiar — and painful — location to be tattooed? Why would Trevor Sr. choose that site for dermal adornment?

Victor Trevor describes the person who threw his father’s, and his, life into chaos as having “crinkled hands [which] were half-closed in a way that is characteristic of sailors.” Are half-closed hands a trait of seafaring men, and if so, why are they wont to carry their hands like that?

In his posthumous narrative, Trevor Sr. relates that each of the 38 convicts, or perhaps 36 if we discount the ill one and the half-witted one, had two pistols, a pound of powder, and 20 slugs, all supplied by Wilson, the sham chaplain. Let’s see...72 pistols at perhaps a pound apiece, 36 pounds of gunpowder, and 720 slugs at about a half-ounce apiece: $72 + 36 + 22\frac{1}{2} = 140\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of armaments. How would a chaplain, of all people, manage to smuggle such a large and bulky cargo aboard a prison ship without exciting comment?

When the prison break began, two sentries were shot, as well as a corporal who injudiciously came running to see what the fuss was about. Then two sentries outside the stateroom (captain’s cabin?) were also gunned down. Then, and only then, was the captain shot by Wilson. Are we to believe that the captain heard nothing until the sentries by the door were killed? Why did Wilson wait so long to shoot him?

The ship’s complement included 18 soldiers, not counting officers. If we assume that the two sentries outside the cell area were soldiers, and that the two outside the stateroom door were also soldiers, this left 14 soldiers and all but one officer to fight. Yet Trevor says that only ten soldiers fired through the swinging skylight into the massed convicts reveling below. Where were the other four soldiers? And why didn’t the captain think to station some soldiers outside the stateroom door to counter a very probable outpouring of the surviving convicts?

Finally, when Trevor/Armitage, Hudson, Evans/Beddoes and the others who did not wish to participate in the slaughter of the surviving people aboard the Gloria Scott were allowed to leave in a small ship's boat, they were told to say if asked that they were survivors from a ship which foundered in longitude 15° (presumably south), latitude 15° west. Was this a plausible location to tell the officers of the Hotspur, which was close enough to the location where the Gloria Scott sank that the "castaways" were picked up the very next day?

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