

Happy Birthday, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!

by Balaji Narasimhan, Bangalore, India

Every time January 6th comes along, one wishes to remember The Great Detective by celebrating his birthday.

But what is the best way of doing this?

One nice way could be reading some of his stories, but this is something that can be done any other day of the year in the privacy of one's home.

We could also smoke a pipe in his honour, but this again is something that is increasingly frowned upon in today's health-conscious world.

So, to truly celebrate, we should perhaps down a peg or two—just small ones, you do not want The Great Detective to be upset with you turning out to be a drunkard, would you?

But if you were to take a small one, be sure he wouldn't mind.

And doctors tell us this is good for the heart.

Now that we have decided to have a drink (merely a thimbleful, you understand, and that too just to keep the edge) we should look at what he would approve of.

Now, we all know that liquor has played a part in deduction—one remembers the rum from BLAC and the three wine glasses in ABBE—but what did Holmes himself consume?

Even in today's modern world, with its computers that can search for anything, this is not an easy task.

Hunting for words like gin and rum through the Canon is made difficult by these words are used in other contexts—they are a part of words like begin and rummaged—but with the other spirits, it is much easier.

In BLUE, Holmes "ordered two glasses of beer from the ruddy-faced, white-aproned landlord" while in SCAN too he drinks beer.

And before you assume that this is his favourite, turn to SIGN, where he says that he knows his white wines.

He has a taste for rare wines too and in LAST, we have seen him sipping Imperial Tokay that comes "from Franz Josef's special cellar at the Schoenbrunn Palace."

Holmes doesn't just drink; he is also a gracious host and offers it to others.

The Tokay mentioned above he gladly shared with his good friend Watson—and had Von Bork not been trussed up like chicken on the sofa, we can be sure that Holmes would have offered this to him too.

This is not to suggest that Holmes doesn't show kindness to criminals.

In matters of alcohol, he is good to both the good guys and the bad ones, something that we have witnessed in SIGN, when he offers

whisky to both Athelney Jones and Jonathan Small.

Regarding the latter, Watson writes, "He stopped and held out his manacled hands for the whisky and water which Holmes had brewed for him."

In STUD, he offers this drink to Gregson, and in both NOBL and REDH, he partakes of it himself.

This is fine, you will say, but what is the drink he would offer if you were to step into his home on January 6th in order to wish him a happy birthday?

In all probability, it would be brandy.

While he has been known to partake of this himself in REIG, this seems to be the drink that he offers to most people—examples include Huxtable (PRIO), Eccles (WIST), Ryder (BLUE), Murdoch (EMPT) Phelps (NAVA) and Watson himself (EMPT).

There is a reason for this—most people come to Holmes when they are distraught, and brandy is the best drink for such people under the circumstances.

So, even if you ask for Imperial Tokay—and Holmes, being the kind-hearted host, will give it to you—don't be surprised if, in the middle of the birthday revelry, somebody staggers in and faints like Huxtable and is helped to his

feet by Holmes with a dash of brandy.

And since this is the drink Holmes keeps handy, maybe this is the right

one for us Sherlockians too (just a drop to keep the chill away on his birthday).

Writing this piece has made me thirsty. Could somebody out there hand me a VSOP, please?

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