



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXV -- The Adventure of the Naval Treaty

What a lovely thing a rose is! And what a fascinating character Sherlock Holmes is! Imagine his breaking off in the middle of a case to admire a rose and muse upon the ways of Providence! Despite this moment of reverie and the perplexity it caused his clients, Holmes was in control of this case from start to finish, sifting through the surfeit of clues with seeming ease and bringing the whole matter to a happy ending, with time left over to play a practical joke on the hapless Percy Phelps. Please join us now as the Hounds ring for a cup of coffee and tread the linoleum-lined halls of the Foreign Office in search of “The Naval Treaty.”

Percy Phelps and friends: I’ll admit it right at the start: I don’t think very highly of Percy “Tadpole” Phelps. He seems to be one of those obnoxious people who lord it over those less gifted or fortunate (Watson, the Tangeys) and royally kiss up to those above them (Lord Holdhurst, Sherlock Holmes.) So forgive me if my questions seem to go in the direction of encouraging negative responses about Phelps. If there is anyone out there who wants to defend this little toady, well — I wish you luck with it.

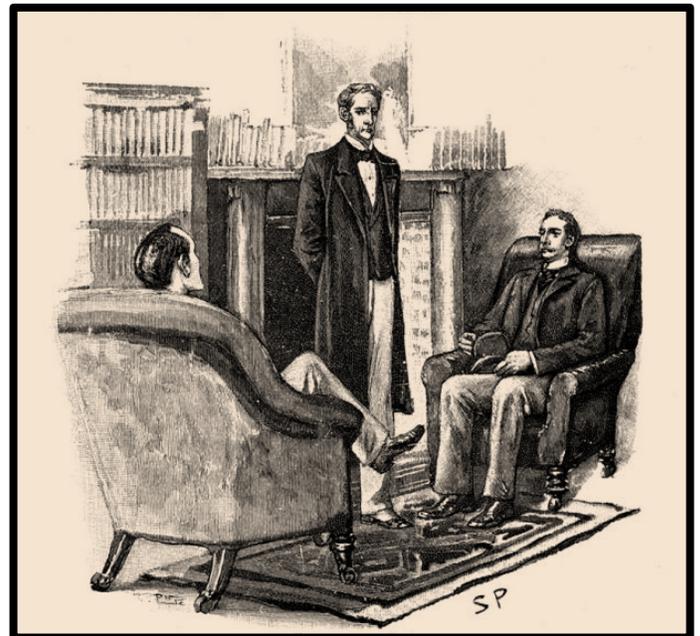
When it comes to character, Annie Harrison seemed far too good for Phelps. His one good point seems to be that he recognized her worth. Or was he marrying her for her family’s money?

On of the most interesting exchanges in the story is this one between Holmes and Watson:

“But the writing is not his own.”

“Precisely. It is a woman’s.”

“A man’s surely,” I cried.



Two questions occur to me. First, why did Watson feel so strongly that Percy's amanuensis must have been a man?

And second, though Holmes was surely right that handwriting can reveal a great deal concerning the character of the writer, is — or was — there any thoroughly reliable way to tell a person's sex from handwriting?

Although Holmes saved Percy's biscuits in the matter of the missing treaty, he certainly picked a rather callous — some might say cruel — way of revealing the happy results of his investigations. Was this Holmes's way of taking the proud Percy down a peg or two in front of his old school-mate Watson — a rather warm and comradely thought on Holmes's part, though perhaps a little too strongly done.

Holmes branches out: Had Holmes been called into this case before Watson got the note from Phelps? Consider that mysterious conversation between Holmes and Watson on the train returning from Woking where Holmes says, "I've been making independent inquiries, you see." But when could he have done that? Watson's narrative implies that he and Holmes set straight off for Woking after Watson showed Holmes the note asking for his help.

I love Holmes's "rose" speech, but is the logic of it truly sound?

I'm not sure this statement is true in terms of a complete Canonical chronology, but if one reads the stories in the Doubleday order, "The Naval Treaty" is the first recorded case in which Holmes stepped outside his role as criminal and personal investigator and began to exert his talents in the realm of national and international affairs. (I don't count "A Scandal in Bohemia" and "The Beryl Coronet" as national or international, since those concerned essentially personal problems, even though some of the individuals involved were of exalted importance.) Is this the first time that Sherlock Holmes ever dealt with a mystery that affected affairs of state? Is it a coincidence that this case should immediately follow "The Greek Interpreter," in which we met brother Mycroft? Had Mycroft discussed the case with Sherlock prior to Watson's receiving the note from Phelps? And if the brothers discussed the case, did Mycroft ask his younger brother to help with the investigation, or did he order him to stay out of international affairs?

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