



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXIII -- The Adventure of Black Peter

These are the moments that Sherlockians live for: to be sitting with Doctor Watson at breakfast when Sherlock Holmes walks in with “his hat upon his head and a huge barbed-headed spear tucked like an umbrella under his arm.” (Which proves that Sherlock Holmes is a creative guy when it comes to accessorizing!) Of course the harpoon is connected to a case, and since the case concerns sailors, you can bet your belying pin that there is blood, gore, and a murderous past to be revealed. So clew up your port to’ga’nt sails, shiver yer timbers, and batten the hatches! There’s fire in the fo’c’sle and crime blows on every strand as the Hounds turn sea-dog and investigate the unlamented death of “Black Peter.”

“Lend me a hand:” When Stanley Hopkins came to call at Baker Street, Holmes told him, “Well, well, it just happens that I have already read the available evidence, including the report of the inquest. . . .” And Watson makes it clear at the outset that Holmes had been working on the case for a least a couple of days prior to the pig-sticking incident. The question is: Why was Holmes involved? Did he look into it at first just because he thought it seemed interesting, or had he been engaged by a client? If the latter, who might the client have been?

Do you think that Holmes was justified in the “high hopes” he had for the future career of Stanley Hopkins? Does Hopkins seem to have any special qualities, other than an almost Watson-like ability to withstand Holmes’s sarcasm and come back for more? Was it likely that Hopkins paid Holmes a fee for his advice and assistance?

Norway and other mysteries: In describing his father’s disappearance, Nelligan says, “He started in his little yacht for Norway.” The phrase “his little yacht,” as opposed to “a little yacht,” suggests that Nelligan senior owned his own boat. That seems a little odd for a West Country banker, doesn’t it? It’s almost as if he



knew he might have to make that voyage one day. Nelligan's partner Dawson had retired and was supposedly not involved in the bank failure, but where exactly was Dawson at the time Nelligan disappeared? Could Dawson have been in Norway already, and was that why Nelligan was headed there? And is this the reason that Holmes himself decided to go to Norway at the conclusion of the case?

Holmes was "thoroughly taken aback" by the evidence of the notebook and the story of the missing securities, presumably because they weakened his theory that an experienced harpooner committed the crime. And yet Holmes was right on the mark after all because it was entirely a coincidence that Nelligan traced the missing securities back to Peter Carey at the same time Patrick Cairns began his efforts at blackmail. Or was it? It is certainly an unlikely convergence of events, given that both men must have been searching for Carey for some time. Is it an unlikely enough coincidence to make us suspect that there actually was some connection between Nelligan and Cairns? Note that Nelligan never did give a completely true account of his visit to Carey's cabin. Only Cairns ever told that part of the story, and his version may have been somewhat modified in an effort to show that he acted in self defense. There is room for doubt here. What say the Hounds to a Nelligan/Cairns conspiracy?

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