



His Last Bow

Adventure XLIII -- The Adventure of the Devil's Foot

I can vividly remember my first reading of this story. I loved the eerie happenings, the suggestion of the supernatural, the daring scientific experiment that nearly went wrong, and the touching but not cloying buddy scene between Holmes and Watson, including Holmes's relapse into his half-humorous, half-cynical attitude immediately after his brush with madness and death. "The Devil's Foot" has everything I love best in the Canon, all rolled into a single tale. It even has one of the great Holmesian quotes, the now-famous exchange:

"I followed you."

"I saw no one."

"That is what you may expect to see when I follow you."

Whether visible or invisible, I hope that the Hounds will follow me into the mystery and glamour of the moors near Poldhu Bay as we discuss this week's thrilling story of "The Devil's Foot."

Strangest case I have handled: Watson opens the story by expressing his surprise that Holmes should have reminded him of the case. But isn't it actually more peculiar that Holmes should have felt that it was all right for Watson to publish an account of a case in which Holmes allowed a criminal to go free? Granted that Watson was always doing things like that, but what did Leon Sterndale think of its publication?

Watson wrote that he and Holmes went to Cornwall so that Holmes could have "a complete change of scene and air." But they could have achieved this in any number of locales. Was there perhaps some specific reason for their choice of Poldhu Bay? Had Holmes begun his language study back in London, and chose to follow up that of all his hobbies when the doctors suggested a rest cure? Or was there some other reason that



Ah! tenez, le voici, un peu en avance. Vous plairait-il de venir de ce côté, docteur Sterndale? Nous avons fait tantôt dans la maison une expérience de chimie qui ne nous permet guère d'y recevoir un visiteur aussi distingué que vous. »

caused Holmes to choose that particular time and place for a vacation – a time and place that happened to coincide with the presence of Dr. Leon Sterndale?

What was Sterndale’s work in Africa, anyway? Lion-hunting for a railroad construction company? Exploration? Medicine? Something else? Something which might have inspired Sherlock Holmes to keep him out of trouble in England and get him back to Africa without incident? Is this another link with Brother Mycroft, perhaps?

After the tragedy at Tredannick Wartha, Mrs. Porter the housekeeper sent a boy to the village to get help. This secured the services of Dr. Richardson and also apparently the “four strong men” who got the Tregennis brothers off to the asylum. Dr. Richardson ran into Mortimer Tregennis, who contacted the vicar. Then Mortimer and Roundhay got Holmes and Watson to come investigate. Now I’ll admit I was re-reading this story on the subway, so I might have missed something, but I didn’t see any mention of the police. Were the police called in at all to investigate the death of Brenda Tregennis? What are we to make of that strange omission? Was this the reason that the police may have seemed resentful during their investigation of the death of Mortimer Tregennis?

We are devil-ridden, Mr. Holmes: What with devils and vicars and the like, “The Devil’s Foot” is a tale with a lot of religious overtones and undertones. And interestingly enough, all seven of the Christian sacraments are represented – either explicitly, symbolically, or perversely – within the pages of this story. Would any Hounds care to play the game of “Find the Sacraments?” For those who didn’t have this list drilled into them in their childhood education, the seven sacraments are: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Penance and Extreme Unction.

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