



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure L – The Problem of Thor Bridge

Sherlock Holmes was expecting a visit from Mr. J. Neil Gibson, a former United States Senator and the world's wealthiest man. Mr. Gibson's wife had been found shot to death at the Gibsons' palatial estate in Hampshire. The family's governess, Miss Grace Dunbar, was being held in connection with the killing. Mr. Gibson was seeking Holmes' help in proving Miss Dunbar innocent.

While Holmes was filling Watson in on some of the details of the case, there was an unexpected visitor in the form of Mr. Marlow Bates, the manager of Mr. Gibson's estate. Mr. Bates, obviously frightened by the prospect of his employer's imminent visit to 221B, hurriedly related that Mr. Gibson had been most cruel towards his late wife, and then ran out of the room before Mr. Gibson's arrival. Shortly thereafter the formidable Mr. Gibson arrived, and after some angry disputation with Holmes, Gibson confessed that he had intentions toward Miss Dunbar that were less than honourable.

I never read this story without reflecting on how little some things change over time. Mr. J. Neil Gibson might be any one of several contemporary men of wealth and influence. Holmes' remark, "Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offenses" is as true today as it was a hundred years ago.

Watson says of the notes on unchronicled cases kept in the fabled dispatch-box, "Some, and not the least interesting, were complete failures, and as such will hardly bear narrating, since no final explanation is forthcoming." In view of the fact that Watson published such cases as FIVE and YELL, which could be called "failures", why did he withhold these others from the public? After making the above observation, Watson proceeds to tell us about three other "failures."



Was Doyle laying the groundwork for possible future stories as he did in the opening paragraph of FINA, in which Watson mentions NAVA?

Holmes mocks Watson by saying, "I am getting into your involved habit, Watson, of telling a story backward." What story did Watson relate backward? And Holmes describes Gibson as "the greatest financial power in the world." More power than the Bank of England or the United States Treasury? How can a man, however wealthy, "make or break" a community, a city, or a nation?

Was the injection of the persona of Mr. Marlow Bates really necessary to this story? What real purpose does he serve in setting the stage that a few more facts about J. Neil Gibson's character brought out in Holmes' prolegomenous monologue to Watson would not have provided equally well? Bates rushes in, blurts out a brief statement to the effect that Gibson is a ba-a-a-d man, and rushes out again. Unlike his counterpart John Mason in SHOS, Marlow Bates is never to be seen more in this adventure. Was Bates a red herring, drawn in front of the reader to generate a sense of pity for Mrs. Gibson (who proves to be not very likable in the final analysis)?

It seems to me that Miss Dunbar's note, "I will be at Thor Bridge at nine o'clock" can only be a response to a request that she be at that place, at that hour. She didn't write, for example, "Meet me at Thor Bridge at nine o'clock." Is the actual wording of her note capable of any interpretation other than that it was a response, not a request?

Finally, what "permits" were necessary for someone to visit a prisoner?

Steve Clarkson

May 28, 1999