



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LII – The Adventure of Sussex Vampire

Some readers may feel cheated that there is in fact no such thing as a Sussex Vampire, but I for one find this adventure to be quite satisfying. It's wonderful to see how Sherlock Holmes was able to apply his superior logic and wisdom to a problem that was created by strong human emotions and confused by elemental human fears. Even Holmes's sarcasm, which we have discussed at some length on the Hounds of late, seems gentler and more to the point. This is the Holmes that I admire! So put away that garlic wreath and come join the Hounds this week as we discuss how the cold light of reason turned "The Sussex Vampire" to dust and ashes.

Agencies: I think the Hounds discuss this one every year, but we have so many new barkers that I think it bears discussing one more time: Why did Holmes twice refer to "this agency" in reference to his own detective business. Had he gone into business with some other person or firm? Was he selling insurance on the side to bring in a few extra bucks?

Did Ferguson think that the firm of Morrison, Morrison, and Dodd were attorneys? By their own description, they were assessors of machinery. But if so, how did they become involved with the Matilda Briggs and the giant rat of Sumatra? And for that matter, if Ferguson was a tea-broker, why was he involved with a Peruvian merchant in the importation of nitrates?

The Wife and Kiddies: Ferguson's story of the so-called vampire attack on the baby includes this statement: "On one occasion about a month ago this child had been left by its nurse for a few minutes." Does this sentence imply that even before the attacks, it was unusual for this baby to be left alone even for a brief time? Does anyone know if Victorian child-rearing included having someone stay with a baby nearly 24 hours a



day, even when the child was nearly a year old?

Was Jacky's infirmity truly caused by a childhood fall, do you think, or was his condition due to some embarrassing or shameful illness? Was this illness possibly something that had afflicted Big Bob Ferguson as well, causing the formerly "slab-sided" athlete's frame to be "fallen in," as Watson put it?

When visiting Mrs. Ferguson in her locked room, Watson made the comment, "It struck me as I looked at it that if Ferguson tried to force his way to his wife he would find it no easy matter." I thought that she was simply being kept away from the baby. What might have made Watson think of it in quite that way? After identifying Jacky as the culprit, Holmes and Watson later left the Fergusons alone to discuss their problems. Was this wise, or was Mrs. Ferguson in some danger? Do you think the couple could forgive and forget their troubles?

I don't have a copy of Grimm's fairy tales with me at the moment, but I can't remember any vampire stories in that particular collection of stories. What I can remember is countless stories of wicked siblings. Did Holmes's mention of Grimm's fairy tales suggest that he already suspected what was going on at Cheeseman's?

At the end of the story, the reader is satisfied that Jacky is indeed the culprit, and even Bob Ferguson seems to accept this as the truth. But is it so certain that Jacky was the villain? Is there any real proof?

Holmes's suggestion of a year at sea for Jacky seems too frivolous to take seriously. What do you suppose really happened to the unhappy boy?

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