



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LII – The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

When faced with an inquiry about vampires, Sherlock Holmes turned to his good old index for information on the subject, but found only what he called “rubbish”. “No ghosts need apply,” he told Watson. But how was he to deal with the situation of a man who claimed that he had caught his South American wife sucking blood from their infant son?

This story begins with Holmes going through one of his massive and omnipresent scrapbooks. What is startling is his filing technique. “Vittoria”, “Vanderbilt,” and “Vampires” filed under “V,” yes. But “Voyage of the *Gloria Scott,*” “Victor Lynch,” and “Venomous lizard, or gila”? This is not filing alphabetically, it’s a mnemonic system of some kind. And if the material about vampires contained in volume “V” was “rubbish”, why did he bother to file it in the first place?

In any event, this is not the only adventure in which a child gives Holmes insight into the solution of a case. I refer, of course, to young Edward Rucastle in COPP, who reflected his father’s dark side faithfully. There aren’t many children mentioned in the Canon; only about two dozen are named (although many more appear ephemerally). It is predictable that Holmes would have developed the art of detection to recognize the importance and relevance of child psychology long before the official forces twigged to its significance.

How would lawyers become involved with the assessment of machinery, and what does the assessment of machinery have to do with tea brokering? And what does the importation of nitrates have to do with either machinery or tea? It sounds as though Ferguson did a little hopscotching in his choices of careers, doesn’t it?

In his letter to Holmes, Ferguson writes of his Peruvian wife’s “alien religion.” What would that have been — Catholic? Incan? And after Ferguson’s revelation that his wife had assaulted her stepson Jacky on two



occasions, Holmes says, “Well, that is not unknown among stepmothers. A posthumous jealousy, we will say.” What a curious choice of words: “posthumous jealousy.” What do you suppose Holmes meant by that?

Baby Ferguson had a “small, angry red pucker” on his throat. That is the hallmark of localized infection. Perhaps it was not dangerous but surely it was uncomfortable for the infant. Discomfort in an infant is usually accompanied by crying and similar behavior, but this child apparently was content, waving his dimpled fists about. My question is, why did Holmes examine the injury instead of asking Watson, the physician on the scene, to have a look at it? Was he afraid that Watson, with his personal knowledge of wounds, might have recognized the injury as one not made by human teeth and suggested the cause before Holmes was prepared to reveal it?

A parting shot: How did Watson come into possession of the letter that Holmes wrote to Morrison, Morrison and Dodd at the conclusion of his investigation?

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