

The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LIII – The Adventure of the Three Garridebs

Seventeen thoughts for further ponderance of "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

1. The Politics Of Knighthood

"I remember the date very well, for it was in the same month that Holmes refused a knighthood for services which may perhaps some day be described. I only refer to the matter in passing, for in my position of partner and confidant I am obliged to be particularly careful to avoid any indiscretion."

Wouldn't the mere mention of Holmes refusing a knighthood have been an indiscretion in itself? Was a refused knighthood something to be bragged about, even by one's friends? What is the standard delay between "services performed" and "offered knighthood"?

2. Watson's Ever-Changing Role

"I repeat, however, that this enables me to fix the date, which was the latter end of June, 1902, shortly after the conclusion of the South African War."

Since he seems to be depending upon memory alone for the date, are we to assume that Watson was no longer taking notes of Holmes's cases? Does this make the data from "Three Garridebs" more suspect than Watson's earlier records?

3. Those Clean-Shaven Americans

"A moment later he was in the room. Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, was a short, powerful man with the round, fresh, clean-shaven face characteristic of so many American men of affairs. "

Did British men of affairs prefer the bearded look of authority? Or are they just not as fresh-faced as Americans? What does Watson mean by his "American" comment?



4. The Obvious Question Goes Unasked

Nathan Garrideb has seen Holmes's pictures. He's read of Holmes's tricks. And it's June of 1902. Why isn't Nathan surprised that Holmes isn't dead? Or did the public of the time take Holmes's adventures in the Strand Magazine as the sort of pulp fiction that made up exciting adventures around a real person, and were not necessarily true? Might they have thought the whole Moriarty thing a fictional exploit?

5. The Great State Of Kansas

“He made his money in real estate, and afterwards in the wheat pit at Chicago, but he spent it in buying up as much land as would make one of your counties, lying along the Arkansas River, west of Fort Dodge. It's grazing-land and lumber-land and arable-land and mineralized-land, and just every sort of land that brings dollars to the man that owns it.”

Wow, Kansas sounds like the best of all possible worlds. Is this just another part of the scam, or is the big flat rectangle of a state actually this resource rich?

6. The Garrideb Estate

“His property was divided into three parts, and I was to have one on condition that I found two Garridebs who would share the remainder. It's five million dollars for each if it is a cent . . .”

An estate worth fifteen million dollars? How would Alexander Hamilton Garrideb have stacked up in the millionaire pecking order of 1902? What other millionaires would have be comparable to AHN?

7. That Old Friend Of Sherlock Holmes

“By the way, it is curious that you should have come from Topeka. I used to have a correspondent--he is dead now--old Dr. Lysander Starr, who was mayor in 1890.”

Holmes later says he never knew a Lysander Starr, but where would he get such a name? Is this some indication of Holmes's reading material or social circles in 1902?

8. As You Wish, Mister Holmes . . .

“Just ring him up, Watson,” Holmes instructs Watson, only to have Nathan Garrideb on the phone with the doctor asking to talk to the detective himself.

While it's nice to see Holmes's orders keeping up with technological advances, why have Watson done the initial phone duties? Was there an operator out there that Holmes was avoiding? Was it sheer laziness? Did Holmes just come up with these little tasks to make Watson feel a part of the team?

9. Those Evil Memories

Little Ryder Street is described by Watson as "one of the smaller offshoots from the Edgware Road, within a stone-throw of old Tyburn Tree of evil memory." Later, we hear Holmes describing "Rodger Prescott of evil memory."

Does Watson's description of the Tyburn Tree show indications that he is against capital punishment? Does Holmes's description of Prescott indicate murder in his past as well, or is coining and forging evil enough?

10. Could Watson Have Called It "The Resident Bachelor"?

"The house had a common stair, and there were a number of names painted in the hall, some indicating offices and some private chambers. It was not a collection of residential flats, but rather the abode of Bohemian bachelors."

Okay, as usual, the discussion leader is confused. If there were private chambers that were the "abode of Bohemian bachelors," why weren't they residential? And what is the exact role of Mrs. Saunders, the "caretaker," who is in the basement until four o'clock? How does the role of a house-agent come into play where Garrideb and his room are concerned?

11. What About The Wheat Penny?

"Syracusan--of the best period," Garrideb explains about a coin he's holding. "They degenerated greatly towards the end. At their best I hold them supreme, though some prefer the Alexandrian school."

Okay, coin experts, does Garrideb know what he's talking about, or is this one more load of hooey in a story full of scams and ruses? Why did the Syracusans' coins degrade?

12. Dr. Watson And Pottery

Garrideb warns, “Dr. Watson--if you would have the goodness to put the Japanese vase to one side.”

It’s interesting to see Watson taking an interest in Japanese pottery in June of 1902, when he’ll be undertaking a crash course in Chinese pottery only a few months later in “Illustrious Client.” Is this a coincidence, or does Watson have a special interest in ceramics of the Orient?

13. The Prices Of Auction Merchandise

“Now and again I drive down to Sotheby's or Christie's,” Nathan Garrideb says, though he professes not to be a rich man. These days we usually only hear of the great auction houses in reference to objects of great value -- could a collector like Garrideb afford to bid there in 1902? And the phrase “I drive down” -- it doesn’t mean he had his own vehicle did it? Was Garrideb hiding wealth to keep Holmes’s rates down?

14. Yee-Haaa! The Chicago Cowboy Is In Town!

“If our Wild West friend tries to live up to his nickname, we must be ready for him. I'll give you an hour for a siesta, Watson . . .”

Is this an example of the “all Americans are cowboys” stereotype one occasionally hears? Holmes has just said that Killer Evans is a Chicago native, and even though Chicago did have a few cows moved through it, it wasn’t quite “Wild West” was it? Holmes continues his cowboy mood by allowing Watson a siesta, which make one wonder if he’s got the West on his mind for some reason. Any clues as to why?

15. Oh, Just Kiss Him, Watson!

“It was worth a wound--it was worth many wounds--to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.”

One has to suspect Watson of a bit of literary scene-chewing here, especially since he’s seen already Holmes emote in a similar scene in “Devil’s Foot” which happened five years earlier. (And didn’t involve getting shot.)

Sure, any manly man would take a bullet for a friend, but would any man on Earth take a bullet just to see his buddy show concern for him? And how deprived of affection would that man be?

We've heard Holmes tell kings and heads of state how important Watson is, how crucial to investigations. We've heard Holmes say, "My dear, Watson." We've seen Holmes treat Watson as a true friend for twenty years. And now we're suddenly supposed to believe Watson was so deprived of kindly treatment that he's happy for a bullet wound, just to see Holmes emote? One has to wonder.

Is this statement a reflection of Watson's mental state in 1902, or perhaps a better reflection of his mental state when writing the tale decades later? Or is this a bit of Mrs. Watson we see slipping in, taking up the pen to fill out his notes as her husband began to fail, and these passages reflect her ignorance of the true friendship between the two men?

16. The Layout Of Garrideb's Building

"Together we looked down into the small cellar which had been disclosed by the secret flap. It was still illuminated by the candle which Evans had taken down with him. Our eyes fell upon a mass of rusted machinery, great rolls of paper, a litter of bottles, and, neatly arranged upon a small table, a number of neat little bundles."

Garrideb has a room on the ground floor of a building whose caretaker lives in the basement. Yet somehow there's a cellar accessible only from a single room in the building. Who owned this place? Would it be that easy for a basement room to go unnoticed?

17. No Five Million? Time For The Home!

At the end of this tale, we learn that Nathan Garrideb was soon headed for "a nursing-home in Brixton."

What were nursing homes like in 1902? Were they a luxury for the wealthier elderly? Missions for the destitute and feeble? How would Garrideb wind up there -- on his own, or sent there by someone?

Brad Keefauver, BSI

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