



## The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

### Adventure LX – The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

This week's story had two other possible titles: "The Adventure of Shoscombe Abbey" and "The Adventure of the Black Spaniel." The former suggests the many religious references and symbols (including Holmes's facetious reference to the "sacred domain" of Sir Robert's home) and the latter gives star billing to the spaniel in the works who proved Holmes's theory that "Lady Beatrice" was an imposter. But whatever we call the story, it's classic Casebook, where the atmosphere is dark and the clues are sensational. I trust that all good Hounds will cease their howling outside the old well-house and join us in the creepy crypt at "Shoscombe Old Place." In a moment, the Comments and Questions to put us on the path to the Shoscombe park gates.

Horses and dogs: Watson said that the story ended on a happy note because Shoscombe Prince won the Derby and the creditors waited until after the race to descend on Sir Robert. But why did the creditors wait? Did Sir Robert go groveling to the Falder in-laws who inherited his sister's estate? If they were sympathetic towards him, why didn't he turn to them in the first place when his sister died?

Watson seemed to have a lot of information about Shoscombe Old Place, which came from his formerly having "summer quarters" nearby, presumably in his army days. However, that would have been more than twenty years prior to the events of this story. Was Holmes content with such aged information? Or was Watson using the military term of "summer quarters" in a humorous way, meaning (as Holmes would have known if it were so) that he had spent time there more recently?

But if Watson had been in the area recently, didn't he run the risk of being recognized by some of the locals?



Is it believable that Sir Robert Norberton could have finished second in the Grand National? A steeplechase is a slightly different sort of horse race from the Derby, but would it be possible for a man “huge in stature,” as Watson describes Sir Robert, to have done so well in an event where the other riders were almost certain to be small and wiry men? This is not to say that a larger man cannot hold his own in equestrian events, but second place in the Grand National? Did he cheat?

Speaking of believable events, is it truly possible that Sir Robert reformed to an “honoured old age?”

Did Watson go to dog shows? Did he follow their results closely in the papers? Maybe he was looking for news of his bull pup’s descendents? Were dog shows more popular in those days, so that it was common for even those who did not own dogs to follow the results of the shows?

Mason and Stephens did not recognize Norlett. Apparently they had never seen him before, which was peculiar enough, but is it possible that they did not even know that Carrie Evans was married? Did Norlett live anywhere near his wife? Sir Robert said, “It came into our heads – it came into my head – that he could for that short period personate my sister.” This sentence intrigues me. Does his quickly corrected statement indicate that the scheme was Carrie’s as much as his own – or perhaps more so? Did Sir Robert know that Carrie’s husband was an actor, prior to her volunteering Mr. Norlett for the role of Lady Beatrice? Did Sir Robert even know that Carrie was married before she produced her rat-faced, thespian spouse?

Holmes took an hour in the crypt to find Lady Beatrice in a “leaden coffin standing on end before the entrance to the vault.” Why did it take so long to locate the right coffin? Were there a lot of coffins standing on end? Wouldn’t the dust of the ages have been a bit disturbed around the coffin which had so recently changed tenants? When Watson says “before the entrance to the vault,” did he mean the crypt itself, or another chamber within the crypt? Is this further evidence of Holmes’s failing eyesight?

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