



Sherlock Holmes by S. J. H.

## **Sherlock Holmes's Violin**

**William C. Honeyman & Conan Doyle**  
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Samuel J. Hardman

**My interest in violins began when my mother gave me a handsome Scottish violin. When I wished to know more about its maker, I consulted William C. Honeyman's *Scottish Violin Makers: Past and Present*; hence, my first contact with William Crawford Honeyman. Later, through genealogical connections, I learned more about Mr. Honeyman and his literary work. When I was a boy, I received several gifts of lasting value, among them *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (1930). The portrait of Sherlock Holmes on the dust covers thrilled me. Stuck fast to my hero, I soon adopted Holmes's deductive method.**

**In her excellent note about William Crawford Honeyman in *The McGovan Casebook*, Mary Anne Alburger demonstrates that she is an able sleuth, especially when she links Honeyman and Sherlock Holmes's musical sensibilities: “But it is likely that Honeyman, always seen with his Stradivarius, and a leading writer of detective fiction, unknowingly supplied Doyle with the idea of making musical sensibilities central to Holmes's character.”**

**When writing about Honeyman, it appears that Alburger did not know about “Sherlock Holmes' Kiwi Connection” by Tom Hunt (2014), or “A Scottish Sherlock Holmes, M'Gov'an, The Edinburgh Detective” by Norval Scrymgeour. Further, she did not know about essential Honeyman information in this note. That Alburger did not know about these works adds luster to her Holmes-like deductions.**

Norval Scrymgeour knew William C. Honeyman quite well. Further, he interviewed Conan Doyle. Scrymgeour's interview with Doyle was reported in *The Scotsman* on 30 November 1930. During the interview, Doyle told Scrymgeour “that when a student at Edinburgh University he read with zest the detective stories of James M'Govan, and although he did not say so, I took it that these then immensely popular sensations, as much as the queer foible of his teacher, the eccentric Bell, influenced him towards evolving the logical processes that in time flowered into the Sherlock Holmes series.” When Scrymgeour told Doyle that he “had known intimately the man who had made famous James M'Govan,” Doyle was not surprised.

Did Conan Doyle know about William Crawford Honeyman's keen interest in rare, antique violins and that Mr. Honeyman was the author of James McGovan? If not, Conan Doyle lived alone in a dark hole, was deaf, dumb, and blind, and could not have written Sherlock Holmes.

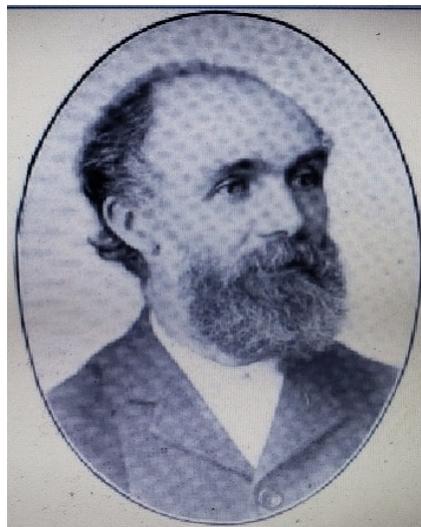
Like Holmes, Honeyman played the violin quite well. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr. Watson makes the following remark: “That he [Holmes] could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some Mendelssohn's Lieder, and other favourites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognized air.” In Doyle's original notes, Sherlock Holmes was a collector of rare, antique violins. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes, like Honeyman, “prattled away about Cremona fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati.” Both Holmes and Honeyman owned Stradivarius violins. Altogether, an acceptable portrait of William Crawford Honeyman. Further, there are clues in Honeyman's “The Romance of a Real Cremona” that link Honeyman to Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Hence, I accept William Crawford Honeyman as one of Conan Doyle's real-life models for Sherlock Holmes and the inspiration for Holmes's violin.

Did Conan Doyle know William Crawford Honeyman? I think so. Honeyman was well-known in Edinburgh as a violinist, writer, and editor when Doyle lived there. Did Doyle know that Honeyman was the author of James McGovan? That Doyle did not know that Honeyman was the author of James McGovan seems quite impossible. The following information about William Crawford Honeyman, published in 1909, makes it quite clear that Honeyman was known as the author of James McGovan in the United States, as well as in England and Scotland. Indeed, it appears that Honeyman made no secret of his famous sleuth, James McGovan. According to a newspaper account and A. Van Doren Honeyman (1909), William Crawford Honeyman, “whose work has entertained thousands of readers

has no pride about him and he hates all shams.”

**Honeyman Family  
In Scotland and America  
1548-1908  
by  
A. Van Doren Honeyman  
Plainfield, N. J.  
1909.**

**Mr. William C. Honeyman, of Newport.**



**“One of the best known authors of the present day in Scotland, and a most successful violinist and musical composer, is William Crawford Honeyman, of Cremona Villa, Newport, Fife. He was born in 1845, and is descended from George Honeyman, farmer and linen weaver, of near Largo, Fife. Mr. Honeyman is a proficient and skillful player upon the violin, and is the author of various works upon that instrument, which have obtained a large circulation in Scotland and England. One work, *The Violin, How to Master It* (1879) had gone through eighteen editions up to a year or so since. The *Edinburgh Scotsman* said of it: 'Full of shrewd practical advise and instruction. The author has contrived to make his work readable and interesting as well as instructive.' All other reviews of it speak in the same high terms, as of a book 'which will be greatly relished by violin players**

everywhere;' as 'wonderful, well packed, comprehensive and thoroughly practical;' and as 'violin-teaching by one whose understanding of the instrument is as nearly as possible perfect.'

Others of similar works are: *The Young Violinist's Tutor*, *Scottish Violin Makers, Past and Present*, *The Secrets of Violin Playing* (1885).

Mr. Honeyman comes honestly of his musical bent, his mother being the second daughter of Mr. Adam Crawford, of Edinburgh, author of 'O, wha hasna' heard o' Toon o' Dunkel?' 'All Hallow Fair, O,' and other racy Scotch songs and poems; also various articles in newspapers and magazines. In addition to his musical work he has been fiction editor of the *People's Journal* and contributed a series of beautiful stories under the title of 'Romances of Real Life' to the *People's Friend*, with which he became permanently connected in 1872. In fiction, among his books are the following: *Brought to Bay*, *Hunted Down*, *Strange Clues*, *Traced and Tracked*, *Solved Mysteries*, etc., many of them running through a large number of editions.

A recent list of his publications indicate that up to 1899 he had published fifty-nine works, chiefly as serials, seventeen of which had been published in book form. He is a methodical worker, writing his stories at his Cremona Villa. One of the Scotch newspapers says of him: 'The man whose work has entertained thousands of readers has no pride about him and he hates all shams.'"

### Miss Lisa Honeyman, of Newport.



“Miss Lisa Honeyman, of Newport, Fife, Scotland, is the daughter of the William Crawford Honeyman of the preceding sketch, and born in Edinburgh. She is a

**solo-violinist of great repute. She began the study of the violin at the age of five, and made her first appearance as a soloist at the age of seven, when it is said of her that she played her solo 'with a truthfulness of intonation and an amount of expression that were altogether beyond what might be expected from a girl of her years.' At the age of fourteen she entered the Royal College of Music, London, as a student, continuing there for six years, her violin masters being Alfred Burnett, R. A. M., and Professor Gompertz. She uses the violin which was made at Cremona in the year 1742 by Joseph Guarnerius (del Jesu), and which was pronounced by Sivori (Paganinni's only pupil) to be 'the finest toned violin in the world.' In Newspaper accounts of her performance in London and in Scotland the critics have stated that 'her execution was faultless,' and 'beyond all criticism;' and that she played 'with grace and sweetness.' Said one journal, 'In her hands the violin is, indeed, a charming instrument. Her playing is a triumph of manipulated skill and artistic expression.'"**

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*Samuel J. Hardman  
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