

APRIL 1, 1968HOWARD B. LUTHER

The New York Times Review of Sunday, January 21, very happily placed on its front page Anthony Boucher's discussion of "The Annotated Sherlock Holmes" by the late William Baring-Gould. This must have attracted wide attention. I hope that it did. Boucher said, "Tomorrow, he who has never loved Holmes will read 'The Annotated' and love him; he who has always loved him will read it tomorrow and find his love renewed". I find the two volumes wonderfully arranged and decidedly interesting. This well-ordered and authentic text runs down the center column of his two-column pages; the outer columns are devoted to annotation and illustration. Boucher also remarks, "All this Sherlockian enthusiasm became informally formalized some thirty years ago through the creation of the Baker Street Irregulars, which came into being through Christopher Morley's column in the Saturday Review of Literature".

This year on Friday, January the 5th, I attended the thirty-fifth annual dinner of the Irregulars at Cavanagh's on West 23rd Street, New York. I had never attended one before--in fact, I just at this recent date became a member of the association. The way in which I became acquainted with its leaders strikes me as an interesting story--actually the entire day Saturday, April 29, leading up to this meeting seems worth the telling. It occurred at Miss Margaret Walsh's house in Philadelphia. There on hand were Carl Anderson, who is consultant and advisor to Miss Walsh on her work running an insurance company she inherited, and Dr. Julian Wolff, of New York, head of the Irregulars, editor of the Baker Street Journal, and probably now the most outstanding Holmesian authority in our country.

First, you should know Miss Walsh's house. She, herself, is Peggy to us because for several years she and my daughter, Frances, have been golf companions at Eastward Ho! Club on Cape Cod. Peggy, an ardent preservationist, wished to help restore the almost slum district called Society Hill. She bought a tumble-down wreck which had been Dolly Madison's house and had it rebuilt. In an article about it in "House Beautiful" of August 1965, it is called a charming town house. There are delightful pictures in the magazine and I quote, "The furnishings are a felicitous mix of antiques,

family heirlooms and other sympathetic pieces of unknown age". Already there is a great change for the better in this district and Society Hill is regaining its prestige.

We had dined at Peggy's, having arrived in Philadelphia Wednesday evening from the Homestead where Peggy had been with us for a week. Saturday, however, is the important day. We joined Peggy early and she took us on an all-day drive. First we went to the Anderson's where the grounds interested us as they showed Mrs. Anderson's skill. I learned that she is almost top among amateur gardeners and flower experts. For our trip there were Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Julian Wolff, Peggy, my daughter Frances, and myself. A few private gardens were visited and then we reached Winterthur to lunch in the pleasant and crowded Pavillion. Our visit was entirely for the magnificent gardens. On that spring day there were masses of bloom but the trees and foliage are so marvelous I would enjoy those gardens even without the flowers.

Back in town I rested a bit before going to the final concert of the Philadelphia Philharmonic before the orchestra left for Japan. I'm amazed that we could go. It was a sell-out. Mr. Anderson provided seats. Frances and I were in one of those little boxes, like those in our Emery Auditorium. These were the Assistant Conductor's seats, but he was a good friend of Mr. Anderson's yet not on hand that evening. Seats for the Wolffs and Peggy were a surprise. We were delighted with the concert; the great Philadelphia Orchestra with Ormandy conducting. At intermission our group was told that we next should all go to Peggy's for a midnight snack. I explained that we couldn't as we had already left word for a 7 a.m. call at our hotel--the nearby Bellevue Stratford, because we must be at Peggy's by nine as she would take us to the Merian Club for golf that day and that night the clocks were put ahead an hour. I was definitely overruled by my daughter and fortunately did go to Peggy's.

The conversation with Mr. Anderson and Dr. Wolff was all about Sherlock Holmes. Without knowing the full background of these two I spoke of my general interest and told them that I had the one volume, a complete Sherlock Holmes with a foreword by Christopher

Morley and felt that Morley, who always appealed to me, had by his short introduction, made that edition just the thing. Then they told of their long and close friendship with Morely and how his death had been a severe blow to them and groups concerned. Soon I learned about the Baker Street Irregulars of which I hadn't known. Then and there I was asked to take an interest and possibly come to the next annual dinner in New York. When I reached home I reread "In Memoriam" by Morely in that volume. In it he stated: "It is a kind of piety for even the least and humblest of Holmes-lovers to pay what tribute he may to this great encyclopaedia of romance that has given the world so much innocent pleasure. Already the grandchildren of Holmes's earliest followers are beginning upon him with equal delight", and he also expresses his admiration for Conan Doyle as follows: "Those of us who in earliest boyhood gave our hearts to Conan Doyle, and have had from him so many hours of good refreshment, find our affection unshakable. What other man led a fuller and heartier and more masculine life? Doctor, whaler, athlete, writer, speculator, dramatist, historian, war correspondent, spiritualist, he was always also the infracaninophile--the helper of the under dog. Big in every way, his virtues had always something of the fresh vigor of the amateur, keen, openminded, flexible, imaginative".

After returning home and rereading In Memoriam by Morley, I reread a couple of his novels, The Haunted Bookshop and then Thorofare--the latter a different type which I found not only wholesome but with many passages containing fine comments and ideas which I had not completely appreciated twenty-five years ago. Morely is certainly much read nowadays. In the book, Perils Named and Unnamed--a history of the Insurance Company of North America which just appeared in January, there is a comment about Benjamin Rush who was president of the INA fifty years ago.

"Benjamin Rush was the epitome of the Old Philadelphian, a member of one of the few truly aristocratic groups in America. As Kitty Foyle's father said in Christopher Morley's novel, 'These folks are so pedigree...they hire someone to drive the Rolls for a year

before they use it, so it won't look too fresh'".

I have already stated that Wolff is probably the greatest living authority on Holmes today. This not only because he is the head of the Baker Street Irregulars and the editor of the Baker Street Journal, but also because there have been so many deaths among the leaders. Morley died in 1957. Baring-Gould died within the last year and his "Annotated" quotes many authorities who have passed on. Of those businessmen of importance who were the best Holmesians, Baring-Gould seems to have picked Edgar W. Smith, a well-known, able and very well placed corporation executive and in the "Annotated" page 103 and 104 are devoted to him:

"What is it that we love in Sherlock Holmes?

"We love the times in which he lived, of course," Edgar wrote, "the half-remembered, half-forgotten times of snug Victorian illusion, of gaslit comfort and contentment, or perfect dignity and grace.

"And we love the place in which the Master moved and had his being: the England of those times, fat with the fruits of her achievements, but strong and daring still with the spirit of imperial adventure. The seas were pounding, then as now, upon her coasts; the winds swept in across the moors, and fog came down on London. It was a stout and pleasant land, full of the flavor of the age; and it is small wonder that we who claim it in our thoughts should look to Baker Street as its epitome!"

And as to Holmes:

"We see in him the fine expression of our urge to trample evil and to set aright the wrongs with which the world is plagued. He is Galahad and Socrates, bringing high adventure to our dull existences and calm judicial logic to our biased minds. He is the success of all our failures; the bold escape from our imprisonment."

"That is the Sherlock Holmes we love--
the Holmes implicit and eternal in
ourselves."

And then it ends with the dedication as
follows:

"It is to the memory of Edgar Wadsworth
Smith, April 1, 1894-September 17, 1960-
one of the best and the wisest' men it has
ever been our great good fortune to know-
that this edition of his favorite reading
is dedicated".

William S. Baring-Gould

And from this month's Baker Street Journal
I read:

"Several readers have sent in announcements
of the Sherlockian exhibition in the
Philadelphia Free Library. The items are
from the collection of Old Irregular Carl
Anderson (my friend Andy) who is now the
fortunate possessor of the Edgar W. Smith
Sherlockian Library".

There will certainly be a younger generation
of able Sherlockians to carry on in the future. At the
annual dinner there were many Irregulars of fairly young
age. First was a cocktail hour in the Crystal Room.
There was nobody present whom I had known except Dr.
Wolff, Commissionaire of the BSI's and Mr. Anderson who
in the course of our correspondence had become "Julian"
and "Andy" to me. I could see little of them, busiest
of all people, but enjoyed conversation with many others.
One man in the early sixties, a professor in a Wisconsin
university, carefully arranged that any meeting with
his New York publishers would occur at the proper date
for the gathering. Another chap talked with me about
M.I.T. as he had known it, but his class was long after
I had left there. There is no woman at the dinner but
for the cocktail hour there on hand was Mrs. Thomas Stix,
the charming wife of one of the most active Irregulars
of whom we will speak later. Mrs. Stix was present to
represent the woman and a toast to her had enthusiastic
response from all those present. I understand that at
all meetings, including those of various Scion Societies,

Irene Adler is always remembered.

Eventually we assembled in the Emerald Room for the dinner at which were 88 or 89 members. Opposite me sat Fred Kelly of the Maiwan Jezails Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. That evening he reported on their effort to have a monument set up on the Afghan field of the fatal battle of the Maiwands. He also was one of the members who wore a deer-stalkers hat. Beside me sat a young scientist who has an important post in Washington. Scattered were several who seemed well under thirty in age. There was much action during the dinner but so arranged that it didn't interfere with dining. Many citations were given to members whose contributions to the association earned merit. Members from various Scion societies made short, interesting reports. There were two important papers of which one was presented by Tom Stix. One short intermission was called, followed by a movie showing Rathbone as Holmes. The popular song, "My Aunt Clara", well-known to all Sherlockians was verse after verse sung by a soloist, with all members joining with gusto at each recurring chorus. Aunt Clara was not a virtuous woman but she had an extremely successful life. As an example of the song, one verse is given here:

"My dear Mother's life has been pious and meek,
She drives in a second-hand Ford,
Aunt Clara received for her birthday last week
A Rolls-Royce, a Stutz and a Cord."

And the chorus so enthusiastically joined by
all:

"We never mention Aunt Clara
Her picture is turned to the wall
Though she lives on the French Riviera
Mother says that she's dead to us all".

New members are rather hastily introduced. Andy told me when my name was called to stand. It seemed rather a vapid gesture to simply give a couple of bows so when I stood I immediately said these few words:

"It was last Spring that I met Julian and
Andy in Philadelphia. I hadn't known much
of BSI then and when I learned of their

long and important relationship to it, I envied them. At times I feel I might envy more their long and close friendship with Christopher Morley".

The Commissionaire quickly said, "Good".

The next afternoon at the cocktail party at Julian Wolff's, Andy, in a humorous way, berated me for speaking at once and cutting out his prepared speech. Andy would have said a few words about my interest that would have made me a proper member but it certainly was not a written speech and would have been as simple as my remarks. If I had realized the proper procedure and still started off it would appear that I wanted to attract attention. It was so quick that it couldn't matter at all.

It is clear that Conan Doyle created really interesting characters in Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson because much attention is paid to them as though they really existed. Studies are made by able men of the background and forefathers of these two. It is done as a pleasant game and after all has some merit. Few characters in fiction have been studied in this manner. Yet Trollope's people arouse somewhat the same interest, though in a different manner--the descendants of these can be brought forward and treated at length in Angela Thirkill's books about them. In these books is a map of the County of Barsetshire carefully worked out from Trollope's descriptions and which definitely pleased me as I never follow the position of the villages in reading the Barchester books which I enjoy very much.

In the "Annotated" are found notes on trivial errors in description and so forth. Doyle himself is quoted, "In short stories it has always seemed to me that so long as you produce your dramatic effect, accuracy of detail matters little. I have never striven for it and have made some bad mistakes in consequence. What matters is I hold my readers". Today some readers, in order to show careful attention to detail, look for these errors. It wouldn't have occurred to me to notice, yet to show how little details are discussed in the notes in "Annotated", I will quote one: Miss Stapleton in The Hound of the Baskervilles said, "Would you mind getting that orchid for me among the mare's-tails yonder?"

We are very rich in orchids on the moor".

And then in "Annotated" is this comment:

"that orchid. What was the orchid? The first difficulty is the lateness of the season, a time of year when few if any orchids would be in flower. The second difficulty is Miss Stapleton's statement that the orchid grew among mare-tails which appear to be unknown on Dartmoor. It is probable that the plant referred to by Miss Stapleton was not the mare"s-tail but the marsh horsetail. Taking these difficulties into consideration, the editors of the Catalogue of the Sherlock Holmes Exhibition cast their vote for Ladies' tresses; it grows on Dartmoor, flowers from September to October, but would not be a plant of wet places that would be growing among either mare's-tails or horsetail".

Slight inaccuracies of this type are not important. On the other hand, an attempt to show deep interests of Sherlock Holmes which are not definitely covered in the Tales is found in Miss Madelein Stern's article, Sherlock Holmes - Rare Book Collector. Listed among Holmes' actual possessions there on Baker Street were Hafiz and Horace, Tacitus, Flaubert and George Sand, Thoreau, Goethe, Carlyle, Meredith. She put in his library first editions of a couple of centuries earlier which she considered among his possessions.

There are many historical factors outside of those which Sherlock Holmes represents which have the attention of many of us. This probably can be seen if I quote a letter I wrote to Dr. Wolff:

"It may interest you to learn of a quotation from a friend of yours. I have started a paper on "The Last Plantagenet". It may not be used but I'll explain it somewhat. I have some but rather vague interest in Richard III. The paper will be chiefly concerned with reading history and following its many varied and disagreeing interpretations. One factor in this connection is

the discussion about Sir Thomas More's History of Richard III. Rowse, a famous living English historian, who is an ardent advocate of the Tudor Dynasty writes, "More's famous account of Richard's usurption has been critically studied in our time so that we can appreciate, as never before, its precise and unique value". Then he adds-- "There are crackpots about, they proliferate in this field as about Shakespeare: people who do not qualify to hold an opinion, much less express one".

More was a real saint and we can feel the deepest admiration for him and yet question a book he wrote when young and immature, which was dictated by Cardinal Morton and which More doesn't seem to wish published. I have quoted several doubters of its value. There was: Professor Kendall of Ohio University (Athens, Ohio) who spent most of a year in England on a fellowship, writing a long and carefully studied "Life of Richard III". The late Thomas Costain who wrote four volumes about England, ending with this Richard. Also, the late Josephine Tey in her novel, "The Daughter of Time" which I enjoy reading.

There is another whom you know and provides me with a quotation. The paragraph I had written is this:

"In early January I thoroughly enjoyed the annual dinner of the Baker Street Irregulars. The enthusiasm of people of all ages in everything about Sherlock Holmes and the numerous Scion Societies is wonderful. There were many people from all over the country at the dinner in New York but from a few of those honored by the association yet unable to attend came messages. One came from Rex Stout which caught my attention because shortly before I had read a recent novel of his, "The Death of a Duxy" in which his great character, Nero Wolfe, takes a stand. I quote, 'The Young Princess had been dead for five centuries, and Wolfe had once spent a week investigating that case,

after which he removed More's "Utopia" from his bookshelves because More had framed Richard III '".

Many show a deep question whether Richard was responsible for the murder of the princes. Nothing is proved and most historians seem certain he did. Actually, it will probably never be known.

I was somewhat surprised and pleased with the reply I had from Dr. Wolff. One paragraph in it read: "I think there is beginning to be a definite change in opinion about Richard III. Since you are interested in him, I am enclosing two items from my commonplace book which you may like to have. (They need not be returned)." My surprise was due to the fact that in his commonplace book he accumulated any information which wasn't directly concerned with material used in the Baker Street Journal.

In the Journal there always is a page or two headed, "From the Editor's Commonplace Book". Under that heading in the Journal for last December is found this item.

"Under the heading 'Universities' the Canada edition of Time for 6 October had much to say--all good--about Irregular Tom Symons, President of Trent University at Peterborough, Ontario. Not only is Tom, Canada's youngest university president, but he is also the only Irregular to achieve the honour of heading a university".

In the past, there have been many other well-known members. In the "Annotated" one reads on page 44: "Only the Baker Street Irregulars knew, while he lived, that President Roosevelt was a free and accepted member of their order. After his death a collection of his letters to Edgar Smith, commenting shrewdly on many aspects of the Canon, was published by the society". Presumably Andy has those letters in the collection he has now placed on exhibition in Philadelphia.

There are more Scion Societies than I would have realized until I read a list as reported in the "Annotated". Quoting from that book on page 40:

"The honor of being the first Scion Society to be formed beyond the boundaries of the greater New York area goes to the Speckled Band of Boston, founded April 26, 1940, by the late James Keddie, Sr. It too, has published handsome volumes: The Second Cab (1967) and The Third Cat (1960). Indeed there is today hardly a city of any size in the United States where a member of the BSI cannot find a Scion Society whose members share interest in things Holmesian.

There are the Hounds of the Baskerville (sic) of Chicago, founded 1943; the Scowrers of San Francisco, the only Scion Society which can boast of a female auxiliary. the Molly Maguires; the Greek Interpreters of East Lansing, Michigan; the Amateur Mendicant Society of Detroit; the Dancing Men of Providence and the Scandalous Bohemians of Akron; the Six Napoleons of Baltimore; the Illustrious Clients of Indianapolis; the Sons of the Copper Beeches of Philadelphia; the Creeping Men of Cleveland; the Musgrave Ritualists of New York, and the Norwegian Explorers of Minneapolis and St. Paul; the Priory Scholars of Pittsburgh, the Red Circle of Washington, D.C.; and the Old Soldiers of Baker Street (the old SOBs) founded in 1952.

In the Baker Street Journal there always appear some articles or pastiches. I will quote from two: from the last copy there is an article entitled Sherlock Holmes and Children.

"It is taken for granted by most enthusiasts that Sherlock Holmes was indifferent to women in general--except perhaps the woman. But there seems to be some doubt about Holmes's feelings toward children (children, in this case, being persons under 15 years of age.) There is, for example, the episode with the six-year-old son of Mordecai Smith in The Sign of the Four:

'Dear little chap!' said Holmes strategically, 'What a rosy-cheeked young rascal! Now, Jack, is there anything you would like?'

'The youth pondered for a moment.
'I'd like a shillin', said he.
'Nothing you would like better?
'I'd like two shillin' better,' the prodigy
answered after some thought.
'Here you are, then! Catch!...!'"

Although the article continues for a page and a half I was interested as to who the author, Glenn Holland, might be. In the "Whodunit" it says, "Glenn S. Holland, a 14-year-old schoolboy, has been interested in the Master since he was 10, and he has already written a few pastiches. His other interests include ancient weapons and writing.

Of entirely different merit is an early article concerned with "The Red Headed League". It raises a question which had often occurred to me. To quote from the "Annotated": "Why did the League give notice to the unfortunate Mr. Wilson before it had accomplished its purpose? Why not pay him another four pounds? As Mr. Thomas L. Stix has observed ("Concerning 'The Red-Headed League'"), the posting of the notice "gave Mr. Wilson the opportunity--an opportunity that he seized brilliantly--to call in Mr. Sherlock Holmes." In the Journal of September 1966 there is an interesting explanation which would certainly make Doyle's action seem wiser. This explanation was written by a German, a Dr. Karl Krejci-Graf, an older, Emeritus Professor of Geology at the University of Frankfurt. His explanation follows:

"Wilson came to Holmes on June 24. Holmes looked into the matter, found that John Clay was digging next to the City and Suburban Bank and went to the directors of the Bank. He surprised them by stating that they expected a large shipment of gold (the only negotiable merchandise one can expect to be stored in a bank), and thus got the case in hand--no doubt with a clear understanding about the financial status. The bankers waited for a favourable market to put the transaction through, and this uncertainty was what had caused the dissolution of the League. Royal-blooded John Clay would not have grudged the payment of

another four pounds to make his arrangement absolutely safe, but he was not sure how much he would have to pay before the affair matured. In fact, he had to wait for fifteen weeks, which would have meant sixty pounds and he was obviously short of money. Only this could have been the reason for not continuing the League. Thus, however, he aroused the anger and the curiosity of Mr. Wilson--and the professional interest of Mr. Sherlock Holmes".

This doesn't seem to be completely accurate but it does make a good case in the favor of the manner in which Conan Doyle handled the situation.

Conan Doyle interested himself in many real life crimes. About four years ago I read a book by John Dixon Carr which told of Conan Doyle's best work in that line. The two most important cases are covered by a note in the "Annotated" which reads:

"George Edalji was sentenced in 1903 to seven years' penal servitude for horse-maiming. In 1906 Conan Doyle heard of this rather obscure case and, after exhaustive investigations lasting nearly a year, began a series of newspaper articles analyzing the incredibly weak evidence of the prosecution and making public 'this blot upon the record of English justice'. In consequence of Conan Doyle's endeavor, Edalji was released but denied compensation. In 1909, Oscar Slater was sentenced to death in Glasgow. This sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. An unceasing battle was fought to prove Slater's innocence. Approached by Slater's lawyer, Conan Doyle took up this case of miscarriage of justice. It was not, however, until 1927 that Conan Doyle finally secured the release of Slater".

Mr. Baring-Gould, in his book, has published the Constitution and By-Laws of the Baker Street Irregulars. The four articles in the Constitution are

followed by the By-Laws. The first article of these By-Laws is: An annual meeting shall be held on January 6 at which the canonical toasts shall be drunk; after which members shall drink at will.

The second article is: The current round shall be bought by any member who fails to identify, by title of story and context, any quotation from the Sacred Writings submitted by any other member. The dinner last January was kept busy but without anybody having to follow up the second paragraph and I did enjoy that dinner so much that I hope to be able to be in New York the first week of next January.

Howard B. Luther

APRIL 8, 1968JOHN W. PECK

The April 8th meeting of the Literary Club was not held because of a curfew imposed by the Mayor of Cincinnati. The curfew was ordered because of civil disturbances in the city.