



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXI -- The Adventure of the Reigate Squire (Puzzle)

Or is it “The Reigate Squires?” Or “The Reigate Squire,” the title under which it was first published? Although it may not be one of Holmes’s truly great cases, I love this story for its portrait of the friendship — and also the partnership — between Holmes and Watson. Holmes had overworked himself on a case, and the faithful Watson naturally dropped everything to come to the aid of his ailing friend. When their relaxing week in the country turned into a murder investigation, Watson was right there to back up Holmes in every way: reacting in horror to Holmes’s fainting fit, taking the blame for the overturned table, and even rescuing Holmes from the clutches of the murderers! Good old Watson! Don’t take a nap on the gun-room sofa yet! In a moment, I’ll post some puzzling Reigate points for the Hounds to ponder.

A week in the country: Early in the investigation, Inspector Forrester said, “I think that Mr. Holmes has not quite got over his illness yet. He’s been behaving very queerly. . . .” Was Forrester right? Later on, when Holmes employed his fainting fit as a diversion, did he choose this method at least in part because he genuinely did not feel well? If he had been feeling completely well, wouldn’t he have been better prepared for the assault by the Cunninghams? What was wrong with Holmes anyway? Was he simply exhausted and run down after the Baron Maupertuis case? Was he still suffering from the depression in which Watson found him?



What about those Cunninghams, and the legal difficulties which led them to such desperate measures to try to get their hands on the paper which gave old Acton “the clearest claim upon half their present estate?” Can the Hounds think of any possible information which could have had such a dramatic effect on their property?

And if the lawsuit had been going on for years without a resolution, how “clear” could that evidence have been? Therefore, why did the Cunninghams suddenly reach the point where they were willing to take the risk of burglary to get that piece of paper away from Acton?

Colonel Hayter: Watson tells us that Holmes and Colonel Hayter had “much in common.” Other than their mutual friendship with Watson, what interests or traits do you suppose Holmes and the Colonel might have shared?

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, the title “Colonel” usually means Bad News! Did you ever wonder a little about Colonel Hayter? We all accept him immediately as one of the good guys, because he is an old friend of Watson’s, but isn’t it odd that at the time of this case, the Colonel apparently had taken up residence in Reigate only recently? He “frequently” asked Watson to visit, and “remarked” that Holmes would also be welcome. I invite the Hounds to reread the breakfast scene where the murder is announced (D399), with the idea that Colonel Hayter could be a suspect in the murder. Notice his “innocent” questions, and the way that Watson described him as “coolly settling down to his breakfast again.” And don’t forget that Hayter took a pistol upstairs with him on the night of the murder! Although the elder Cunningham’s confession makes no mention of Hayter’s complicity, is it just possible that Holmes and Watson missed something here? But what did they miss? How and why might Hayter have been involved in the Cunningham/Acton feud?

Was it wise of Holmes to “hide none of my methods . . . from anyone who might take an intelligent interest in them.” Did criminals read Watson’s accounts of Holmes’s cases?

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