



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXIV -- The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter

Perhaps its story structure leaves something to be desired: nearly all of the action is presented to the reader by the narration of one of the characters. But whatever its failings, “The Greek Interpreter” provides us with one of the Canon’s legendary supporting characters, Mycroft Holmes. His “absolutely corpulent” figure joins the dainty one of Irene Adler as one of those people who seem to hold an endless fascination for Sherlockians. A third legend, the brilliantly evil Moriarty, waits for us in a story yet to come, but for now, let’s enjoy the relative peace and quiet and kick off the week’s discussion with a few comments and questions about the senior Holmes brother, and the story in which we meet him. And don’t forget that “The Greek Interpreter” is also famously the source of one of the best-loved quotes in the Canon: “Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms.”

Brother Mycroft Exerts Himself: Why are most of us so interested in Mycroft? Is it simply that he is the brother of Sherlock Holmes, and therefore another factor in the life and development of our hero? Are we intrigued by the suggestion that Mycroft’s powers are greater than the mighty Sherlock’s? Mycroft certainly has his moment when he tops Sherlock in their little game of observation and deduction, but beyond that, can it really be said that the elder brother demonstrates any superior knowledge and judgment? If we had only the evidence of “The Greek Interpreter,” and never heard (in “The Bruce-Partington Plans”) that sometimes Mycroft “IS the British government,” would we find him as interesting as we do?



It is fun to hear about the early life and family of Sherlock Holmes, and this story is the source of a good deal of what we do know. And wouldn’t you like to know more about Holmes’s grandmother? Besides passing along that “art in the blood,” do you think that she was a direct influence on either or both (or all three) of the Holmes brothers?

Do you think that Mycroft was really as sedentary and misanthropic as Sherlock led Watson to believe? How could a man observe and deduce anything intelligent about the world and people around him unless he had to some extent mingled in that world to gain knowledge of it? And if Mycroft was so introverted, how did he acquire his “slight acquaintance” with Mr. Melas?

We’ve been talking about Canonical Dummies for the last few weeks. Does “The Greek Interpreter” give us a few more instances of stupidity in action? Mycroft Holmes may not qualify as stupid, but he made a serious mistake by putting an advertisement in the paper and revealing to the villains that Mr. Melas had told his story. Was he unaware that he was putting Melas in serious danger, or did he not care?

“The Greek Interpreter” has some similarities to “The Engineer’s Thumb.” Which do you think is the better story?

Did Holmes and Watson really play golf, or were they talking about the use of golf clubs as murder weapons?

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