



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXV – The Adventure of the Six Napoleons

Our next story, *The Adventure of the Six Napoleons*, is one of the most international in the canon, being a smorgasbord of Brits, Italians, Germans, French emperors and French specialists, and even a Dutch-sounding company. Into this far-flung cast of characters strides Sherlock Holmes, himself a swirl of French and British blood. The international Hounds of the Internet could have a lot to say about this story! My questions to get us going:

Critics sometimes complain that SIXN is nothing more than a retelling of BLUE. But we have it from Holmes himself that SIXN “...presents some features which make it absolutely original in the history of crime.” What are those features that distinguish SIXN not only from BLUE but from other crimes as well?

Beppo served one year in jail after being found guilty either of attempted murder or assault with a deadly weapon — the specific charges were unclear. The sentence for petty larceny quoted by Lestrade was six months at most. The petty larceny penalty seems fair, but shouldn't more serious charges merit a more serious sentence than one year behind bars?

In this story we see that the institution of the Press was valued by, and useful to, Holmes. How might Holmes feel about the modern media, that institution so very fashionable to criticize?



The pearl isn't the only jewelry in SIXN. There was also a "Catholic emblem" found on Venucci's body. This is generally thought to be a saint's medallion, and the Oxford goes so far as to suggest it could be that of St. Peter, for whom Pietro Venucci may be named. Ah, but there are lots of saints named Peter! Most of them were honorable men who ably served the church. One who didn't serve ably was St. Peter of Morrone (1214-96), a hermit the church kindly called "simple," but who probably was mentally retarded. This Peter was suddenly vaulted into the Vatican and installed as Pope Celestine V, a puppet-pope whose strings were pulled by a cadre of Neapolitan princes and cardinals. Peter proved himself so incapable that the boys from Naples were forced to get rid of him after a few months, compelling him to abdicate. He died in their captivity shortly afterward and was canonized out of pity 20 years later. One church commentator called Peter of Morrone devout, but a "most pathetic figure."

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