



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXVI – The Adventure of the Three Students

Sherlock Holmes was researching early English charters at a major university when Mr. Hilton Soames, a tutor and lecturer in the Greek language, dropped by to present an unusual problem to him. Holmes was not of a mind to entertain trivial matters such as apparent cheating on a scholarship examination, but he rather ungraciously agreed to look into the matter.

The problem was this: Soames had been proofreading his portion of an examination for the Fortescue Scholarship after the galley proofs were returned by the printer. He stepped out for a spot of tea and returned about an hour later to find that someone had entered his rooms and apparently had copied some or all of the proofs. There were only three persons taking that portion of the Fortescue examination: a young athlete named Gilchrist; an inscrutable native of India named Daulat Ras; and a rakehell young student named Miles McLaren.

One of these men must have intruded and copied the examination in Greek; no one else would have had any interest in the matter. The question is, which one?

St. Luke is reputed to have been a Greek physician who hailed from Antioch (now located in Turkey). There are parallels between “Greek,” which Soames taught, and “physician,” which was Watson’s profession. Could there be a link also between “Antioch” and the great university where this Adventure takes place?

Young Gilchrist was poor and would have wanted very much to win the Fortescue Scholarship to further his education. Might he have mentioned this to Bannister, who then sought to help his young master by leaving the key in Soames’ door when he knew that the tutor was not in his rooms?



Soames' portion of the Fortescue Scholarship consisted of half a chapter of Thucydides. The passage of Thucydides was sent to a printer for replication, and the printer would have had to typeset the galley proofs in Greek characters. Did printers know Greek in those days?

In any case, Soames had not finished proofreading the printer's galleys by 4:30 of the afternoon before the Examination. He discovered shortly after 5:30 that the proofs had been tampered with. That same evening he called upon Holmes and Watson (who seemed to be better acquainted with Soames than Holmes was). The resulting investigation ended shortly before 9:00, with Soames protesting to Holmes that the matter must be resolved that evening so that the Examination could go forward on the morrow as scheduled. Even if Holmes had so obliged Soames, would there have remained enough time to finish proofreading the papers, deliver them to the printer first thing in the morning, have any necessary corrections made, and still be able to start the Fortescue Examination on time?

I have sometimes wondered how Gilchrist made the long jump from being a university student to a commissioned member of the Rhodesian Police Force. What would his qualifications for the latter position have been? When did he apply for the position, and why did he apply if he was so interested in continuing his education that he would cheat to win a scholarship? It sounds to me as though he was considering "getting out of Dodge" before the specter of the Fortescue loomed on the immediate horizon.

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January 01, 1999