



His Last Bow

Adventure XLIV -- The Adventure of the Red Circle

Put a candle in the window and practice counting out the alphabet; it's time to discuss "The Red Circle."

Questions by request: Isn't killing people still against the law, even if the person who was killed was a murderer? Did Gennaro Lucca have to stand trial, and if so, what was the verdict likely to have been? Watson describes Detective Leverton as "a quiet, businesslike young man." How does Watson know that if he only just met Leverton? Emilia Lucca said that Gennaro had been trying to contact the Italian and American police. Why didn't he try the British police? Or Sherlock Holmes?

Some vexed questions: The improbable candle-flash code, using the English alphabet to form Italian words, is much discussed by Sherlockians, usually with the implication that Watson (or Doyle) got it wrong. But if we approach the issue with the idea that the code was exactly what Watson said it was, can we think of any reason why the Luccas might have employed such a code?

Although "The Red Circle" may not make the top ten list of our favorite Canonical tales, it may take the prize in at least one area of achievement: it is almost impossible to assign a date to it. Baring-Gould relies on the "fingerprint theory" to date the story in 1902, but others cite Watson's implied residence in Baker Street in order to set the story earlier. The issue may never be settled, but I would like to point out an odd moment in this story that might suggest a few possibilities.



The thing that struck me as strange is Watson's question to Holmes: "Why should you go further in it? What have you to gain from it?" Since when does Watson try to talk Holmes out of taking a case? I can think of at least one other story where he does: "The Devil's Foot," when Holmes was unwell. What say the Hounds to these lines of thought?

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