



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LI – The Adventure of the Creeping Man

While claiming to observe “a certain reticence and discretion” in his writing, Doctor Watson also told us that he published this story “to dispel once and for all the ugly rumors” about Professor Presbury’s case. We can never know what Watson’s reticence concealed and what rumors his story dispelled, but that doesn’t mean that we can’t speculate on these and other issues concerning this week’s story. (I wonder if one of the Professor’s symptoms was a craving for “Rhesus Pieces!”) In a moment, the comments and questions for “The Creeping Man.”

Rising above Nature: Could this be a true story? Could some drug – cocaine, for instance – have been the true active ingredient in the youth-serum, inducing a sense of vigor and power in Professor Presbury which took the form of ape-antics purely by the power of suggestion?

Holmes recommends that we “always look at the hands first,” and perhaps this was still an informative exercise in 1903, when this story took place. But is it possible nowadays to learn very much from the observation of people’s hands? Have any Hounds tried this?

What do you think of Holmes’s philosophy at the end of this story: “Consider, Watson, that the material, the sensual, the worldly would all prolong their worthless lives. The spiritual would not avoid the call to something higher.” And yet, Professor Presbury was not trying to avoid death, but rather to regain the powers of his youth. Wouldn’t we have more sympathy for the Professor had he been battling for his life against a fatal disease? Wouldn’t most of us prefer to put off “the call to something higher” for as long as possible?



We don't get all the details of Presbury's engagement to Alice Morphy, but we are left with the impression that although she liked the Professor somewhat, she had other younger suitors she liked better, and she accepted the Professor largely to please her father. In the England of 1903, how difficult was it for a young lady of good family to break off an engagement that her father preferred?

When animals attack: Animals in the Canon are a dangerous commodity. From the crocodile that made Jonathan Small-er to the renowned Hound of the Baskervilles, the Canonical world is bristling with the jaws that bite, the claws that catch. Were matters so perilous between the human and the animal kingdoms in Holmes's day, or did he just see more of this sort of thing because of the line of work he was in? But does a detective's work necessarily bring him into contact with more vicious animals than the average person would encounter? Why ARE there so many animal attacks in the Canon?

Is Holmes correct in saying that "a dog reflects the family life?" Is Watson too quick to dismiss the idea as "far-fetched," or was the pun on "fetch" another example of the good doctor's pawky humor?

I've always been suspicious of Watson's information that Roy's collar had been "made for a thick-necked Newfoundland." I can see how Watson could have observed that the collar was intended for a dog with a bigger neck than Roy, but where was this Newfoundland, and why was Roy wearing his collar? Were dog collars not mass produced in various sizes in 1903, so that there would have been a long delay in getting a collar that would fit Roy better?

I always find it odd that a professor and a scientist was willing to take the monkey serum without testing it first. Did the professor try the injections out on Roy before taking them himself?

Was Lowenstein prosecuted for gland larceny?

Rosemary Michaud