



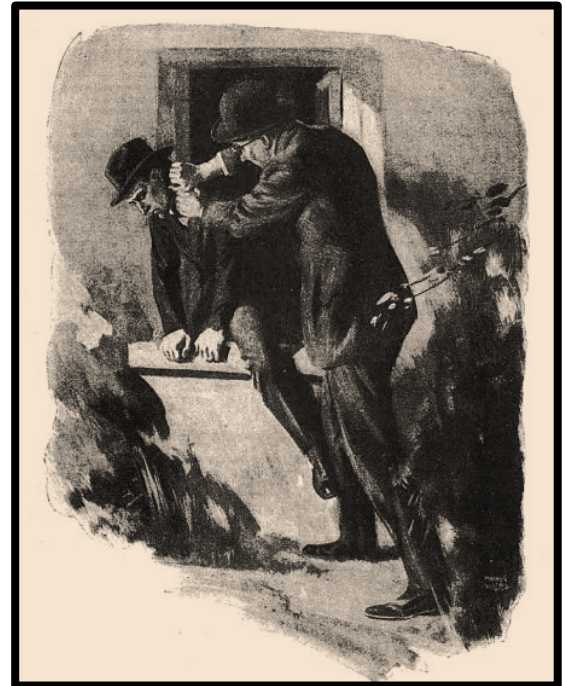
The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LVIII – The Adventure of the Retired Colourman

I remember well the first time I read this story. I was in that first wave of Sherlockian enthusiasm: the one that impels the incipient Sherlockian to run out and buy the Doubleday complete and read it from cover to cover. As I turned my eyes to page 1113, I remember thinking with sadness that this was the last of the first readings. Never again would I be able to read a new Sherlock Holmes story for the first time! In spite of its limitations, I treasured it then, and I treasure it now. It may be mediocre compared to some of the other Holmes tales, and yet it's not "devoid of interest and even of instruction." In a moment, I'll stop daydreaming about Watson's "natural advantages" and send out the Comments and Questions to introduce this week's story of "The Retired Colourman."

Chess curious: Who won most of the chess games between Amberley and Ernest? If Amberley was used to being the chess master and young Doctor Ernest took him to school, might that be enough to send the old crank over the murderous edge? Would it at least have been enough to start Amberley wondering if Ernest wasn't also winning a few matches with his wife?

Was Mrs. Amberley actually fooling around? Is it possible that she really did have a headache that night she didn't go to the theatre? Did Amberley give her something at dinner to ensure that she would not feel well enough to go? Did he deliberately buy tickets to a play that he knew she would not want to attend?



Holmes's "pathetic and futile" speech is rather moving, and when we get to know Josiah Amberley better, he seems far too despicable a toad to inspire such empathy or compassion. What might have been the reason that Amberley's case elicited such an unusual expression of feeling from Holmes?

Did Amberley come to Holmes because he wanted to get caught? Or did Amberley go to Holmes

mainly because he found out that Dr. Ernest's family had gone to Barker, and Amberley actually thought that Holmes would help him disprove anything Barker uncovered?

The limb of the law: Watson says that the case became "the eager debate of all England." A double murder is certainly sensational, but what was there to debate about?

Why did Holmes go to such great lengths to mention all the ladies that Watson could have charmed for information, only to tell him that the information had already been gathered by telephone? Was Holmes ever quite satisfied with the way Watson handled things when he sent him out alone? The one exception I can think of was The Hound of the Baskervilles, but was Holmes really satisfied in that case, or did Watson just put him on the defensive with his "You use me and do not trust me!" tirade?

Were there ever any "Coptic Patriarchs," or did Holmes just invent them because he didn't feel like getting involved in Amberley's dreary case? If so, what changed his mind?

Holmes called Inspector McKinnon "a good fellow." Was this a compliment to his personality or to his talents as a detective? If the latter, was Scotland Yard getting smarter or was Holmes mellowing? Did Holmes know that McKinnon had his own suspicions about Amberley?

Was Amberley's conviction a certainty?

Rosemary Michaud