



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LX – The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

John Mason, the head trainer for Sir Robert Norberton’s stable of racehorses, was a hard-bitten man with “a firm, austere expression which is only seen upon those who have to control horses or boys.” One would surmise correctly that it would take a good deal to perturb Mr. Mason. And yet, the recent goings-on at Shoscombe Old Place had upset him to the point where he decided to call in Sherlock Holmes.

Watson said of the enigmatic Sir Robert Norberton that he should have been “a buck of the Regency.” Politically, the Regency was the period from 1811 to 1820. These were the times when, due to illness, George III was considered incapable of fulfilling his role as monarch. In 1811, the Regency Act was passed and George III’s eldest son, George, Prince of Wales, became Prince Regent and ruled in the King’s place. The era of the Regency was notable for many things— among them, the tendency of the landed gentry to live their lives to the fullest. The spirit of Squire Western (Fielding, “Tom Jones”) lived on in those times. But under the tranquil veneer of the countryside lay a penchant for sudden and ferocious violence. It is in that context that the reader is expected to view Sir Robert.

I am bemused by Holmes’s deductions as he peered through the low-power microscope. How would a scientist visually identify glue, even microscopically, as compared to other brown, globular matter? In the same vein, how could the observer identify “hairs” as being from a tweed coat as opposed to cashmere, astrachan, or, in the case of a cap, the wearer’s head?

Wouldn’t other, more definitive tests be required for positive identification — or did such tests exist at the time?



If Sir Robert Norberton exercised and trained the Shoscombe Prince's half-brother for the benefit of the touts, when and where did he exercise and train the Shoscombe Prince without the touts' knowledge? Can two horses be so alike in appearance and gait as to be indistinguishable one from the other? And wouldn't the oddsmakers be even a little suspicious when Sir Robert was wagering everything he could raise on a horse that was rated at 100-to-1? As Holmes remarked under similar circumstances in SILV, "Hum! Somebody knows something, that is clear."

Holmes and Watson left their spoon-bait for jack at the inn, and Watson writes, "That absolved us from fishing for the day." Yet later that same day, without returning to the inn, Holmes and Watson managed to catch enough trout for supper that evening. What did they use for bait, and if they had lures of some kind, why did Watson feel "absolved" from having to fish? Could it be that he was no admirer of Izaak Walton?

There was another hint of adultery in this story; it would appear that Doyle had a fascination for the subject. Or was he aware of the power of titillation upon the minds of potential readers? In any case, did Sir Robert really carry on an affair with Carrie Evans Norlett, as was widely bruited about? Why would her husband connive with Sir Robert to carry on the pretense that Lady Beatrice was still alive if he was being cuckolded by Sir Robert?

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