



CHAPTER I

Mr. Sherlock Holmes

Mr. Sherlock Holmes was seated at the breakfast table. He usually got up very late in the mornings, except when he stayed up all night. I stood upon the fireplace rug and picked up the cane which our visitor had left behind him the night before. It was a fine, thick piece of wood, with a rounded head. Just under the head was a broad silver band nearly an inch across. "To James Mortimer, M.R.C.S., from his friends of the C.C.H.," was engraved upon it, with the date "1884." It was just the type of walking stick that old-fashioned family doctors used to carry—dignified, solid, and reassuring.

"Well, Watson, what do you make of it?"

Holmes was sitting with his back to me, and I had given him no sign of what I was doing.

"How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back of your head."

"I have, at least, a well-polished, silver-plated

coffee pot in front of me,” said he. “But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor’s cane? Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him and have no idea why he came here, this accidental souvenir becomes important. Let me hear you reconstruct the man by examining it.”

“I think,” said I, following as far as I could the methods of my companion, “that Dr. Mortimer is a successful, elderly medical man, well-respected, since those who know him give him this mark of their appreciation.”

“Good!” said Holmes. “Excellent!”

“I think also that he is probably a country doctor who does a great deal of his visiting on foot.”

“Why so?”

“Because this cane, though originally a very fine one, has been knocked about so much that I can hardly imagine a town doctor carrying it. The thick iron cap at the bottom is worn down, so he has probably done a great amount of walking with it.”

“Perfectly logical!” said Holmes.

“And then again, there is the ‘friends of the C.C.H.’ I would guess that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt club. He has probably given some of the members medical assistance, and they have presented him a gift in return.”

“Really, Watson, you outdo yourself,” said Holmes, pushing back his chair and lighting a

cigarette. "I am forced to say that in all the stories you have written about my small successes, you have constantly underrated your own abilities. It may be that you do not shed a great deal of light yourself, but you are a conductor of light. Some people who don't possess genius have a remarkable power of inspiring it. I confess, my dear fellow, that I owe a lot to you."

He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure. In the past, I had often been irritated by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to publicize his methods. I was proud, too, to think that I had mastered his system of making deductions well enough to apply it in a way which earned his approval. He now took the cane from my hands and examined it for a few minutes with his naked eyes. Then with an interested expression he laid down his cigarette, and carrying the cane to the window, he looked over it again with a magnifying glass.

"Interesting, though elementary," said he as he returned to his favorite corner of the sofa. "There are certainly one or two clues here which give us the basis for several deductions."

"Has anything escaped me?" I asked with some self-importance. "I trust that I have overlooked nothing important?"

"I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were wrong. When I said that

you inspired me I meant, to be blunt, that in noting your mistakes, I was sometimes guided toward the truth. Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a country doctor. And he walks a good deal."

"Then I was right."

"To that extent."

"But that was all."

"No, no, my dear Watson, not all—by no means all. I would suggest, for example, that a gift to a doctor is more likely to come from a hospital than from a hunt, and that when the initials 'C.C.' are placed before that hospital the words 'Charing Cross' very naturally come to mind."

"You may be right."

"Probably. And if we take this as a working hypothesis, we have a fresh basis to begin our construction of this unknown visitor."

"Well, then, supposing that 'C.C.H.' does stand for 'Charing Cross Hospital,' what further conclusions may we draw?"

"Do none suggest themselves? You know my methods. Apply them!"

"I can only think of the obvious conclusion that the man has practiced in town before going to the country."

"I think that we might infer a little more than this. Look at it in this way. When would it be most likely that such a presentation would be made? When would his friends unite to give him

a token of their good will? Obviously at the moment when Dr. Mortimer withdrew from the service of the hospital in order to start in practice for himself. We know there has been a presentation. We believe there has been a change from a town hospital to a country practice. Is it, then, too much to say that the presentation was on the occasion of the change?"

"It certainly seems probable."

"Now, you will observe that he could not have been on the permanent staff of the hospital, since only a man well-established in a London practice could hold such a position. A person like that would not drift into the country. What was he, then? If he was in the hospital and yet not on the staff, he could only have been a house surgeon or a house physician—little more than a senior student. And he left five years ago—the date is on the cane. So your stern, middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson. The man who emerges in his place is a young fellow under thirty, good-natured, lacking in ambition, absent-minded, and the owner of a favorite dog, which I should describe roughly as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff."

I laughed in amazement as Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his sofa and blew little wavering rings of smoke up to the ceiling.

"As to the latter part, I have no means of checking you," said I, "but at least it is not diffi-

cult to find out a few facts about the man's age and professional career." From my small medical shelf I took down the Medical Directory and turned to the name. There were several Mortimers, but only one who could be our visitor. I read his record aloud.

"Mortimer, James, M.R.C.S., 1882, Grimpen, Dartmoor, Devon. House-surgeon, from 1882 to 1884, at Charing Cross Hospital. Winner of the Jackson prize for Comparative Pathology, with essay entitled 'Is Disease a Reversion?' Corresponding member of the Swedish Pathological Society. Author of 'Some Freaks of Genetics' (Lancet 1882). 'Do We Progress?' (Journal of Psychology, March, 1883). Medical Officer for the parishes of Grimpen, Thorsley, and High Barrow."

"No mention of that local hunt, Watson," said Holmes with a mischievous smile, "but a country doctor, as you very cleverly observed. I think that I am correct in my inferences. As to the adjectives, I said, if I remember right, good-natured, lacking in ambition, and absent-minded. It is my experience that it is only a good-natured man in this world who receives expressions of appreciation, only a man who lacks ambition who abandons a London career for the country, and only an absent-minded one who leaves his cane and not his visiting card after waiting an hour in your room."

“And the dog?”

“Has been in the habit of carrying this cane behind his master. Since it’s a heavy cane, the dog has held it tightly by the middle, and the marks of his teeth are very plainly visible. The dog’s jaw, as shown in the space between these marks, is too broad in my opinion for a terrier and not broad enough for a mastiff. It may have been—yes, by Jove, it is a curly-haired spaniel.”

He had risen and paced the room as he spoke. Now he halted in the recess of the window. He sounded so certain of this fact that I glanced up in surprise.

“My dear fellow, how can you possibly be so sure of that?”

“For the very simple reason that I see the dog himself on our very doorstep, and there is the ring of its owner. Don’t leave, I beg you, Watson. He is a professional brother of yours, and your presence may be helpful to me. Now is the fateful moment, Watson, when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you do not know whether it is for good or ill. What does Dr. James Mortimer, the man of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime? Come in!”

The appearance of our visitor was a surprise to me, since I had expected a typical country doctor. He was a very tall, thin man, with a long nose like a beak, which stuck out between two intelligent,

gray eyes, set closely together and sparkling brightly from behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. He was dressed in a professional but rather sloppy manner, for his dress-coat was dirty and his trousers frayed. Though young, his long back was already bent, and he walked with his head thrust forward and a general air of peering kindness. As he entered his eyes fell upon the cane in Holmes's hand, and he ran toward it with an exclamation of joy.

"I am so very glad," said he. "I was not sure whether I had left it here or in the Shipping Office. I would not lose that cane for the world."

"A gift, I see," said Holmes.

"Yes, sir."

"From Charing Cross Hospital?"

"From one or two friends there on the occasion of my marriage."

"Dear, dear, that's bad!" said Holmes, shaking his head.

Dr. Mortimer blinked through his glasses in mild astonishment.

"Why was it bad?"

"Only that you have disturbed our little deductions. Your marriage, you say?"

"Yes, sir. I married, and so left the hospital, and with it all hopes of a consulting practice. It was necessary to make a home of my own."

"Come, come, we are not so far wrong, after all," said Holmes. "And now, Dr. James

Mortimer—”

“Mister, sir, Mister—a humble M.R.C.S.”

“And a man of precise mind, evidently.”

“A dabbler in science, Mr. Holmes, a picker up of shells on the shores of the great unknown ocean. I believe that it is Mr. Sherlock Holmes whom I am addressing and not—”

“No, this is my friend Dr. Watson.”

“Glad to meet you, sir. I have heard your name mentioned in connection with that of your friend. You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. I had hardly expected your skull to be so long or your forehead to be so high. Would you have any objection to my running my finger along the middle of your skull? A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be a welcome addition to any natural science museum. It is not my intention to flatter you, but I confess that I desire your skull.”

Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. “You are enthusiastic about your specialty, I realize, sir, as I am in mine,” said he. “I observe from your forefinger that you make your own cigarettes. Feel free to light one.”

The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising skill. He had long, quivering fingers, as energetic and restless as the antennae of an insect.

Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest which he took in

our curious companion.

“I can guess, sir,” he finally said, “that it was not merely for the purpose of examining my skull that you have done me the honor to call here last night and again today?”

“No, sir, no; though I am happy to have had the opportunity of doing that as well. I came to you, Mr. Holmes, because I recognized that I am myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly faced with a most serious and extraordinary problem. Recognizing, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe—”

“Indeed, sir! May I ask who has the honor to be the first?” asked Holmes with some sharpness.

“To the man of purely scientific mind, the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly.”

“Then shouldn’t you consult him?”

“I said, sir, to the purely scientific mind. But as a practical man of the world it is well known that you stand alone. I trust, sir, that I have not accidentally—”

“Just a little,” said Holmes. “I think, Dr. Mortimer, it would be wise if you would simply tell me the exact nature of the problem you want me to help you with.”