

# THE REAL SHERLOCK HOLMES

<sup>1</sup> The English detective Sherlock Holmes died with his creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, on July 7, 1930, at Conan Doyle's home in Sussex. But to his legion of readers and admirers the most famous sleuth of all detective fiction is still very much alive.

<sup>2</sup> It is probably true, as many believe, that Holmes was modeled after Dr. Joseph Bell of Edinburgh, but there is also no doubt that in a very real sense Holmes was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. Throughout Conan Doyle's extraordinary, many-sided life—as student, physician, writer, and spiritualist—he always remained the private detective, the hound of truth on the trail of injustice and official apathy.

<sup>3</sup> Twice in his career Conan Doyle undertook laborious investigations because he believed that justice had not been done. There is a flavor of Sherlock Holmes in both episodes—that pinch of the bizarre that marks most of the fictional detective's adventures. The cases of George Edalji and Oscar Slater were notorious in their day. They shook all England, and the thunder of Conan Doyle's denunciations crossed the Atlantic.

<sup>4</sup> George Edalji, a young law student, had been tried and imprisoned for the crime of horse maiming. Sir Arthur, on hearing of the case some time later, was convinced that Edalji was not guilty, and immediately went to work to ascertain the truth.

<sup>5</sup> The defense of Edalji had been weakly put forth. As far as Conan Doyle was able to find, no mention had been made of the fact that the prisoner was almost blind—a significant fact, since between his home and the scene of the crime there stretched a complex expanse of rails, wires, and other obstacles. The prisoner, severely handicapped by his poor sight even in broad daylight, was accused of having crossed this maze to the scene of the crime at night, not just once, but repeatedly. After a long and tiring battle, resulting in the establishment of an official government investigating committee, Conan Doyle

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finally succeeded in securing Edalji's freedom.

6 Sir Arthur's success in this case led to a request that he enter the notorious Slater case. An elderly spinster had been murdered, and Slater, a German immigrant, was arrested for the crime after he had pawned a diamond brooch similar to the one missing from the dead woman's flat. Although it was shown that the brooches were not identical, and although Slater produced a clear alibi, he was held for the crime. Already found guilty in the newspapers and by aroused public opinion, Slater had been tried for the murder and convicted. Two days before the scheduled execution his sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment.

7 Conan Doyle investigated the case and produced a brilliant pamphlet in which he re-examined the evidence presented at the trial. Many years later, as a result of Conan Doyle's dogged work, Slater received a new trial and was acquitted.

8 Minor mysteries, too, were frequently brought to Sir Arthur's attention. One involved a man who had mysteriously disappeared after withdrawing his entire bank balance of forty pounds from a London bank. It was feared that he had been robbed and slain. The supposed victim had come up to London in the morning and registered at a hotel. In the evening he had attended a performance at the theater, after which he had returned to his hotel, discarded his evening garments, and changed into street clothes. The dress suit was discovered in his hotel room the next morning.

9 No one actually saw the missing man leave the hotel, but an occupant of a neighboring room remembered hearing someone moving about during the night. A week passed before Conan Doyle was brought into the case, and the police had discovered exactly nothing. The baffling aspects of the mystery would have provided a perfect opening for an adventure of Sherlock Holmes.

10 The facts were communicated by relatives of the missing man living in the country, and Sir Arthur answered by return post that, obviously, the vanished citizen was either in Glasgow or Edinburgh. It was later proved that the man had gone to Edinburgh. You can almost hear the admiring Watson congratulating Holmes on

his shrewd conclusion, and Holmes's depreciating retort, "Elementary, my dear Watson, elementary!"

11 Sir Arthur later explained how he had solved the problem in his autobiography, *Memories and Adventures*:

12 "The one advantage I possessed was that I was familiar with the routine of London hotels. The first thing was to look at the facts and separate what was certain from what was conjecture. It was all certain except the statement of the person who heard the missing man in the night. How could he tell such a sound from any other sound in a large hotel? The point could be disregarded if it contradicted the general conclusions. The first deduction was that the man had meant to disappear. Why else should he draw all his money? He had got out of the hotel during the night. But there is a night porter in all hotels, and it is impossible to get out without his knowledge when the door is once shut. The door is shut after the theatergoers return—say at twelve o'clock. He had come from the music hall at ten, had changed his clothes, and had departed with his bag. Since no one had seen him leave, the inference is that he did so at the moment when the hall was full of returning guests, which is from eleven to eleven thirty. After that hour, even if the doors were still open, there are few people coming and going, so that he with his bag would certainly have been seen.

13 "Having got so far upon firm ground, we now ask ourselves why a man who desires to hide himself should go out at such an hour. If he intended to conceal himself in London, he need never have gone to the hotel at all; clearly, then, he was going to catch a train which would carry him away. But a man who is deposited by a train in any provincial station during the night is likely to be noticed, and he might be sure that when the alarm was raised and his description given, some guard or porter would remember him. Therefore his destination would be some large town which he would reach as a terminus where all his fellow passengers would disembark and where

he would lose himself in the crowd. When one checks the timetable and sees that the great Scotch expresses bound for Edinburgh and Glasgow start about midnight, the goal is reached. As for his dress suit, the fact that he abandoned it proved that he intended to adopt a line of life where there were no social amenities. This deduction also proved to be correct."

<sup>14</sup> In another of Conan Doyle's cases, one involving a young woman engaged to be married to a foreigner, the man also disappeared. By a process of reasoning similar to that displayed in his solution of the Edinburgh case, Conan Doyle was able to show where the missing foreigner had gone—and how unworthy he was of his fiancée's affection.

<sup>15</sup> Not all the novelist's detective cases, however, were as successful as these. Sir Arthur relates with great gusto the story of a burglary within a stone's throw of his own house. The local constable, unencumbered with theories, had already seized the culprit by the time Sir Arthur had come to the conclusion that the man was left-handed and had nails in his shoes.

<sup>16</sup> Even in his spiritualist investigations, which filled the last years of his life, Conan Doyle remained the detective, applying logical reasoning to the obscure problems of psychic phenomena. To the end he combined the traits of a scientific investigator with the curiosity of a child—a most successful blend, it would seem, for the perfect sleuth.

#### HOW WELL DID YOU READ?

##### Can you draw the right inferences?

1. **There is evidence in the story that**
  - A Conan Doyle had been a professional sleuth
  - B Conan Doyle relived his personal experiences through his stories
  - C Conan Doyle resembled Sherlock Holmes
2. **Conan Doyle's reaction to his failure in the burglary case showed that he**
  - A was essentially a modest man
  - B had a sense of humor
  - C could be childish at times

##### Can you see the similarity?

3. **Detective work and spiritualism are similar in that both**
  - A are based on logical thinking
  - B contain an element of mystery
  - C appeal to a scientific mind

##### Did you notice the details?

4. **Conan Doyle's part in the Edalji case was to**
  - A find the true murderer and expose him
  - B demonstrate that Edalji was almost blind
  - C prove it was impossible for Edalji to have committed the crime
5. **One element in the story of the missing man that Conan Doyle disregarded was the**
  - A withdrawal of all the man's money from the bank
  - B hour at which the man returned to his room
  - C noise overheard from his room
6. **Conan Doyle's method for locating the missing man was to**
  - A put together all known facts, then figure out logical explanations for the unknown ones
  - B search carefully for clues, then follow the trail of the clues
  - C question everyone who could possibly have been involved, thus revealing unknown facts
7. **The most important clue in the case of the missing man was the**
  - A dress suit found in his room
  - B hour at which he left the hotel
  - C description given by the porter

##### Can you draw the right conclusions?

8. **As a result of Conan Doyle's investigations in the infamous case involving the German immigrant Slater, Slater**
  - A was immediately given a full pardon by the government and freed
  - B was, after many years, given a new trial and acquitted
  - C was tried for murder and convicted

9. Slater's conviction was an example of  
 A the work of a fair but poorly informed court  
 B public opinion influencing a court decision  
 C the danger of having no alibi
10. Most of Conan Doyle's detective work was  
 A done at the request of the authorities  
 B part of his constant search for material for his writing  
 C the result of his love of truth and justice

12. produced (6)  
 A caused  
 B manufactured  
 C offered
13. certain (12)  
 A established as fact  
 B sure in mind  
 C inevitable
14. obscure (16)  
 A gloomy  
 B faintly masked  
 C little-known; vague

### LEARN ABOUT WORDS

A. Often you can tell the meaning of a word from its context—the words around it.

**Directions:** Find the word in the paragraph that means

1. one who believes in communication with the spirits of the dead (2)
2. indifference (2)
3. verbal attacks (3)
4. find out (4)
5. made less severe (6)
6. making light of (10)
7. guesswork (12)
8. courteous acts (13)
9. unhindered (15)

B. A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used.

**Directions:** Decide which meaning fits the word as it is used in the paragraph. Write the letter that stands before the meaning you choose.

10. pinch (3)  
 A squeeze  
 B emergency  
 C small amount
11. put forth (5)  
 A presented  
 B published  
 C extended

C. The prefix *dis-* means "apart" or "opposite of."

**Directions:** Decide the meaning of *dis-* in each word below. Write *apart* or *opposite of*.

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 15. disperse    | 19. displeasing  |
| 16. disrupt     | 20. disagree     |
| 17. distinguish | 21. discern      |
| 18. dispel      | 22. dissatisfied |

D. An **idiom** is an accepted phrase or expression that does not mean literally what it says. "They had a heart-to-heart talk" does not mean that their hearts conversed with each other. It means that they had a candid, frank discussion.

**Directions:** The idioms in column II are built on the word *heart*. Write the idiom that best fits each meaning in column I.

#### I

23. from memory
24. decide that one wants
25. as much as one desires
26. new attitude
27. cause great grief or disappointment
28. be kind, sympathetic, or merciful
29. afraid; nervous
30. unwillingly
31. be overcome with grief; pine away
32. dear to one
33. sincerely

#### II

- break one's heart
- change of heart
- have a heart
- set one's heart on by heart
- to one's heart's content
- eat one's heart out
- near one's heart
- with half a heart
- from the heart
- heart in mouth