

THE DISTRICT MESSENGER

The Newsletter of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London
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The Best Sherlock Holmes Stories, chosen by the author (Hearthstone Publications, The Coach House, Munslow, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 9ET) is an excellent introductory volume. In 1927 **The Strand Magazine** asked its readers to name the 12 best Holmes stories; there was a prize for the list closest to Conan Doyle's own choice. This new volume, like **The Baker Street Dozen** of a few years ago, presents ACD's selection along with his essay "How I Made My List". He regretted that two favourite tales from **The Casebook** were excluded, as the series was not yet in book form; this volume includes them with the original "twelve best" in a plain, strong and attractive book. The paperback is £9.50, and a limited hardback edition £22.00. Hearthstone have issued **The Collected Brigadier Gerard Stories** in a similar edition.

Pastiche-haters had better skip the next few paragraphs, as both big and small presses have been publishing quite a few lately. Big House Books (63 Wellington Road, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 5EZ) is a small publisher, whose proprietor, Eddie Maguire, has written a brief tale involving Holmes and Watson with ancestors of our own late President, Lord Gore-Booth at their home, Lissadell House in County Sligo. **The Irish Professor** is nicely devised, and the production is good quality amateur. The story does no violence to our received image of Holmes and Watson, but it is let down by some occasionally clumsy writing and some very cavalier punctuation. (It's good enough that I wish I'd had the chance to proof-read it.) The booklet is very reasonably priced at £2.00 including postage, from Big House Books; cheques should be payable to Eddie Maguire. It's already selling well at Lissadell.

Sherlock Holmes in Canterbury by Miles Elward (Wynne Howard Publications, 10 Betula Close, Kenley, Surrey CR8 5ET) is more substantial and more solidly produced. The three stories present Holmes and Watson with just the sort of problems that ACD himself concocted - murder, theft, mysteries from the past - and the writing is generally sound. The worst fault is this generation's carelessness with punctuation. Mostly this is just irritating, but now and then it actually changes the author's meaning. Towards the end of "The Missing Cleric", for instance, because of a missing comma Holmes apparently offers the astonishing instruction: 'Have no compunction about shooting Watson. He is a most dangerous creature.!!' The price of this nice little book is £4.50 (+ 70p postage from the publisher); there is a special price of £4.00 post-free if you mention your membership of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London.

Something old and something new from Ian Henry Publications Ltd (20 Park Drive, Romford RM1 4LH). **Sherlock Holmes and the Hellbirds** by Austin Mitchelson & Nicholas Utechin (£13.99), delayed from March to June, was worth the wait. First published nearly 20 years ago, this second novel by Mitchelson and Utechin throws the aging Holmes and Watson into the thick of the Kaiser's war, by way of an apparently motiveless death in rural Essex, and the sinister legend of the hell birds. The style is closer than

most to the true Watson, and if the story sometimes smacks more of Buchan than Conan Doyle, well, there's no harm in it. Readers of **Sherlock Holmes and the Earthquake Machine** will expect high adventure along with the detection, and they won't be disappointed. Glen Petrie's **The Hampstead Poisonings** (£15.55) is the third "Mycroft Holmes adventure", and a jolly good read it is too, though it has to be said that this isn't quite the Mycroft that we know from the Canon. The case occurs in the early '80s, however, when Mycroft is only 35 and presumably a little less sedentary than he becomes later (and we have to accept, incidentally, that the Holmes brothers are in frequent contact and that Mycroft and Watson met shortly after the detective and the doctor moved into Baker Street). It's a complex legal case, made more so by diplomatic considerations. The characters include a Russian princess and her black Cockney servant, a pimp, Prince Albert Edward, the young Edward Marshall Hall, a dubious hero of Rorke's Drift, and a cast of, well, dozens. The result is just a little like one of M. J. Trow's Inspector Lestrade novels, but without the slapstick. I enjoyed it very much.

The writer who begins a new Sherlock Holmes novel by referring (in character as the narrator, Henry Vernier) to "the ridiculous fictional creation of John Watson" and "Watson's foolish stories", and saying, "I cannot forgive him for parading so distorted, so petty, a rendering of my cousin before the public for all those years," - such a writer had better have something pretty damn' good to put in the place of Watson's accounts. Sam Siciliano, in **The Angel of the Opera** (Robert Hale Ltd, Clerkenwell House, Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £16.99) does a surprisingly good job. It's no easy thing to tell a familiar story and make it unfamiliar. The trouble is that in pitting Holmes against Erik, the Ghost of the Paris Opera, he presents us with a character who is just too different from the one we know. And it is hard to forgive this Holmes's denigration of that admirable friend and human being John H. Watson, MD.

A rather less usual publication is **The Hound of the Baskervilles: An FCE set text (1994/95) Photocopiable Resource Pack** by Graham Palmer (One Tree Publishing, 73 Queens Road, Royston, Herts. SG7 8AN; £10.00), "the first of a series of Resource Packs for UCLES' FCE set texts, developed with the non-literature specialist in mind who otherwise might feel intimidated by handling a whole novel". FCE is new to me, but to judge by the level of the questions and exercises in this spiral-bound volume it's aimed at people for whom English is a second language - and there could hardly be a better introduction to English literature than the works of Arthur Conan Doyle. This pack may not be of immediate practical use to most of us, but less obviously Graham Palmer's incisive analysis and consideration of this, the greatest of the Sherlock Holmes stories, has much to teach us about why **The Hound of the Baskervilles** is such a masterpiece.

I've received most interesting new works from two Continental societies. Miguel Gonzalez Pedel of the Amateur Mendicant Society (c/o Antonio Iriarte, Barbara de Braganza 4 (5o), 28004, Madrid, Spain) has sent a copy of Sr Iriarte's **Algunas Leguas Al Norte De Oporto; ¿La Verdad Sobre El Norah Creina?**, the society's 3rd monograph. The title translates as **Some Leagues to the North of Oporto: The truth about the Norah Creina?**, and fortunately for me, the author has provided a summary in English. Sr Iriarte discusses the dating of the Brook Street Mystery and the Worthingdon Bank robbery; and the identity of the **Norah Creina** and the origins of the name. Much sound reasoning leads him to the conclusion that the bank robbers were in fact Fenian rebels. This is grand scholarship!

Uwe Sommerlad has likewise provided an English summary of his new book **Schellow Holmes: Erich Schellow zum Achtzigsten** (Von Herder Airguns Ltd, c/o Michael Ross Verlag, "Baskerville Bücher", Bendheide 65, 47906 Kempen, Germany; DM15,-. SFr15,-. ÖS115,-). The series of six plays broadcast in 1967 by WDR, with Erich Schellow as Holmes, has been rather unfairly forgotten, as the very good selection of stills indicates. It's of particular interest to British Holmesians as the scripts were all adapted from those for the 1955 BBC plays with Douglas Wilmer and Nigel Stock. (The shooting schedule seems to have been no less punishing than for the British series.) It's an engrossing story, well told and handsomely presented.

Speaking of Douglas Wilmer, I'm delighted to report that the four superb unabridged readings he recorded for our Society have been licensed for general release to Penguin Audiobooks this month, as a 2-cassette pack, **Four Great Adventures of Sherlock Holmes** (27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ; £7.99). Penguin also have **The Hound of the Baskervilles** read by Freddie Jones (£7.99), which I hope to review shortly.

Published last month were an abridged edition of Michael Dibdin's **The Last Sherlock Holmes Story**, in Oxford University Press's "Oxford Bookworms" series (£1.60), and **The New Windmill Book of Sherlock Holmes Short Stories** by Arthur Conan Doyle (Heinemann Educational; £4.50), In April Allison & Busby (179 King's Cross Road, London WC1X 9BZ) issued **The Fu-Manchu Omnibus** by Sax Rohmer - the first three novels in one big, meaty book for £8.99.

Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes Catalogue no. 13 is out now from Rupert Books (58/59 Stonefield, Bar Hill, Cambridge CB3 8TE). Ming Books has issued a similarly substantial catalogue of **Crime Fiction including Sherlock Holmes, Doyle & Sherlockiana, Thrillers, Mysteries and True Crime** (Ming House, 1 Penrose Avenue, Carpenders Park, Watford WD1 5AE) (*wasn't Ming one of Rupert's chums in Nutwood?*). Do send a stamped & self-addressed envelope when you request a catalogue, and please mention **The District Messenger**.

We found at Lawley's **Padlock Holmes**, a Lakeland Bear from Peter Fagan's Colour Box Miniatures (Orchard Estate, Lauder, Berwickshire). "The Lakeland Bear characters have been created by Wendy Phillips and recreated in plush by the Dean's Ragbook Company. These bears are the originals for the Colour Box figurines..." This endearing little figure stands some 3½" tall, wears deerstalker, country tweeds and clogs, and carries a magnifying lens. He costs about £19.00.

Over the weekend 13th-15th October, the University of Minnesota hosts **Sherlock Holmes & John Bennett Shaw: The Detective & the Collector**, being a memorial conference on "The Victorian World and the Master Detective" and the dedication of the John Bennett Shaw Library. Among the many participants will be Richard Lancelyn Green, Derham Groves, Jennie C. Paton, Stefanie Kate Hawks, Enola Stewart, Thomas L. Stix Jr, and of course Dorothy Rowe Shaw. Full registration fee is \$10.00; meals are extra. Arrange your own accommodation. Closing date is the 2nd October. (Registrar 2207, University of Minnesota, Professional Development, 235 Nolte Centre, 315 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455-0139, USA. Fax 612 626-1632.) (*Wish we could be there. The Library is Big Brother's lasting gift to his friends.*)

From Peter Blau: Edwin Blum, co-scriptwriter of Rathbone's **The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes**, died on 2nd May.

A reminder that the Stanley MacKenzie Collection will be auctioned at

Sotheby's in Bond Street, London on Monday 24th July. For details call Peter Selley on 0171-408 5295.

Can anyone help George Vanderburgh with copies of **The Chronicles of Addington Peace** by Bertram Fletcher Robinson and **The Slaves of Paris** by Emile Gaboriau? If so, please contact him at PO Box 204, 420 Owen Sound Street, Shelburne, Ontario L0N 1S0, Canada.

This Saturday, the 1st July, at Groombridge Place, Dame Jean Conan Doyle will unveil a plaque commemorating her father, Groombridge is the "real" Birlstone Manor, and now houses the collection of the Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Establishment. Saturday and Sunday will be devoted to Conan Doyle, and all who have an interest are invited to attend. More information can be had from the Establishment's Curator, Malcolm Payne, 4 Wealden Close, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 2ST.

Our Society's coach-trip to Holmesian Berkshire will depart (and return) on Sunday the 9th July. On the previous day the Franco-Midland Hardware Company's Annual Dinner and Excursion will take place in Windsor (details from "The Stock-broker's Clerk", 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3RU). The Baskerville Hounds have arranged their Summer Pack Meet on Dartmoor over the weekend 21st-23rd July ("The Kennel Maid", 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3RU). The Northern Musgraves will hold a Garden Party at Stonyhurst on Saturday 22nd July (Christine Fell, 136 Savick Way, Beechwood Park, Lea, Preston, Lanes. PR2 1XA). There'll be an ACD Weekend run jointly by the Franco-Midland Hardware Company and the East Anglian Dancing Men (& Women) (Geoff Budd, The School of English & American Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ), The River Dart Cruise of the Poor Folk Upon the Moors will take place on Saturday 19th August (Mike Philipson, 4 Dolvin Road, Tavistock, Devon PL19 9EA). The same day, the Irregular Special Railway Company's Canonical Monopoly takes them to railway and other locations in London (Dr Antony Richards, 163 Marine Parade, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex SS9 2RB). The Reichenbach Irregulars plan a weekend meeting in Bad Mergentheim, 22nd - 24th September (Klaus Wörner, Törkelgasse 9, 97980 Bad Mergentheim, Germany).

Periodicals received. **The Baker Street Journal** March 1995 (PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331, USA) (*late for unavoidable reasons but still a must for all serious Holmesians; it's published by the Baker Street Irregulars, but is available to all*); **The New Baker Street Pillar Box** no. 22 (The Franco-Midland Hardware Company, address above) (*always a good deal of stimulating and opinionated scholarship*); **Communication** no. 150 & no. 151 (The Pleasant Places of Florida, Dr Benton Wood BSI, Box 740, Ellenton, FL 34222, USA) (*no. 151? now there's a coincidence!*); **The Parallelogram** no. 20 (The Parallel Case of St Louis, Joseph J. Eckrich BSI, 914 Oakmoor, Fenton, MO 63026, USA) (*lively as ever*); **The Soft-Nosed Bullet-In** May 1995 (Von Herder Airguns Ltd, Michael Ross, Bendheide 65, 47906 Kempen, Germany) (*a special brief issue, mainly concerned with **Schellow Holmes***); **The School Report** no. 21 (The Priory Scholars of Leicester, Horace L. Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY) (*particularly interesting observations on "The Crooked Man"*); **Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press** May 1995 (Peter E. Blau BSI, 3900 Tunlaw Road NW #119, Washington, DC 20007-4830, USA) (*the invaluable newsletter*).

