

The Adventure of the Haunted Library - Haun
The Saint Mystery Magazine, November, 1963
The Casebook of Solar Pons

Date

Copper/Summer, 1921
Pattrick/Probably 1921

Quotes

- Jamison: *I hope you haven't got us out on a wild goose chase. I have some doubts about following your lead in such matters, Pons.*
- Pons: *When I've misled you, they'll be justified. Not until then.*
- *Something new under England's sun.*

The Case

Mrs. Margaret Ashcroft summons Pons to her home to investigate her haunted library. Pons does not witness the apparition, but he does believe that Mrs. Ashcroft and her maid did see something in the library. He uses a piece of thread to help bring the case to a successful conclusion.

Comments

- This case shows that Solar Pons was more than a carbon copy of Sherlock Holmes. Unlike Sherlock Holmes, Pons is willing to consider the possible existence of the supernatural. Whereas Holmes once said "This agency is firmly grounded in reality. Ghosts need not apply," Pons keeps an open mind in this regard. The personality is broadened from that of his illustrious predecessor.

When Parker tells Pons that he certainly doesn't believe in ghosts, the detective replies "Ought we not to say, rather, we believe there are certain phenomena which science as yet has not correctly interpreted or explained?" Holmes certainly never said anything resembling that.

The use of a piece of thread as a trip-wire is a reasonable approach for both men. But the tone of the case would have been quite different if it had been brought before Sherlock Holmes. He would have immediately dismissed a supernatural explanation and emphasized the mundane, though the solution would remain unchanged.

- Captain Brensham sings a sea shanty that is likely 'Yo Ho Ho and a Bottle of Rum.' Except of course, that isn't actually a sea shanty. Popular culture associates this tune, which begins "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest; Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum," with pirates. But it was actually written for a musical, influenced by Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, *Treasure Island*.

However, it was inspired by a legend attributed to the famous Blackbeard. After putting down a mutiny on his ship, he stranded fifteen men on a deserted island with only a bottle of rum. That small piece of land has been identified as Dead Man's Island, which is a national park in the British Virgin Islands.

- Pons is actually the second investigator brought in by Mrs. Ashcroft. Carnacki, a "self-styled psychic investigator." He declared the problem to be of natural origins. Mrs. Ashcroft then contacts Pons.

Carnacki was the creation of H.H. Hodgson and appeared in four stories between 1910 and 1912. August Derleth wrote three new tales featuring the detective in 1948. Carnacki used both scientific and supernatural methods in his cases, which had solutions of both types.

Parker instinctively refers to Carnacki as a charlatan. Pons has a more favorable view, responding, "If he were, he would hardly have turned down our client." Pons had already reported to Parker that Carnacki reportedly had been successful in some of his cases.

- The Pontine (and Sherlockian) Canon is replete with scenes in which the detective makes an apparently impossible observation, leaving the good doctor flabbergasted. He then explains the circumstances that allowed him to make the deduction and his companion is no longer impressed.

Derleth eschews this common device and shortcuts the process. Parker returns to Praed St and is greeted with "Ah, Parker. I see by the sour expression you're wearing you've been out calling on your crotchety Mr. Barnes."

Parker ignores the comment and steers the conversation in a new direction. Pons could have omitted the "sour expression you're wearing." Parker would likely respond along the lines of "Really, Pons! I have not uttered a single word since my return. How could you possibly know where I have been?" It is curious that Derleth chose to provide a condensed version of this tool.

