

The Adventure of the Swedenborg Signatures - Swed
The Nero Wolfe Mystery Magazine, June, 1954
The Reminiscences of Solar Pons, 1961

Date

Copper/June, 1925

Patrick/1925

Quotes

- *I have often maintained that the science of deduction, if carried to its logical conclusion, is capable of informing the trained observer with the same certainty as any set of facts put down with concomitant proof in writing*
- *I dislike meaningful coincidences that come so opportunely.*

The Case

Lois Graham visits Praed Street, concerned about her aunt, Agatha Stowecroft. Stowecroft believes in the Doctrine of Signatures, which states that all “significant events in a life are presaged by lesser events of the same nature.” Several events had occurred, ranging from a lamp breaking to a fatal car crash that killed her cousin Courtenay and his wife, Isobel. Then Agatha Stowecroft’s will disappeared and she believes that she will soon die. Lois Graham does not believe in the Doctrine but suspects that something is wrong and wants Pons to get to the bottom of things.

Comments

- Bail Copper dates this case in June, 1925, while Robert Patrick pegged it for an unknown month in that same year. Copper places *The Adventure of the Tottenham Werewolf* in mid-July of 1933, while Patrick believes it occurred in the summer of 1934.

Why do I link these two cases? Because Lois Graham tells Pons that she heard of him from mutual friends of Octavius Grayle. They told her of how Pons saved “Septimus from arrest for murder.” Pons encountered the Septimus Grayle affair in *The Tottenham Werewolf*. Clearly one of these two cases is misdated. Lois Graham could not possibly refer to one of Pons’ cases eight years before it occurred! This is definitely a subject for further exploration.

- Swedenborgism is an offshoot of the Christian religion based on the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish scientist and theologian born in 1688. It is a spiritualist based doctrine and does not fall under the Christian umbrella. For example, Jesus Christ did not come to forgive original sin, but to reveal the nature of reality and the spiritual life. The Swedenborgian Church of North America claims about 50,000 members throughout the world.
- Graham’s cousin, Ale Stowecroft, is a follower of Aleister Crowley. Crowley cannot be neatly categorized, but his life pattern can be generalized as one filled

with the pursuit of hedonism and mysticism. Crowley endorsed his nickname of “The Beast” and was often called “The Wickedest Man in the World” by the press.

Crowley was also mentioned in *The Adventure of the Whispering Knights*. In that tale, a coven had formed to practice black magic, influenced by Crowley’s teachings

- Doctor Parker seems to be in an irritable mood after Lois Graham leaves Praed Street. As he does throughout the Canon, Pons “needles” the doctor into defending his viewpoints and assertions. Pons often seems to do this to amuse himself. Parker seems annoyed with Pons’ method in this instance and becomes a bit argumentative. Pons first says of Parker, “You are at your most cantankerous.” Shortly after he adds, “You’re in fine fettle today, Parker.” Throughout the Canon, Parker is amazingly patient and reserved in his conversations with Pons. A less gentle-natured man would find many instances for vociferous argument, or at least offense. Perhaps Parker was just having a bad day, or his plans upon returning from his walk were disrupted by the presence of a client for Pons.
- Pons intended to visit Stowcroft Hall on the day following Lois Graham’s visit. However, that night, Graham’s cousin, Laurel, had apparently gone sleepwalking and was found drowned. Pons and Parke traveled to the Hall four days later. Is this not curious? Two siblings had died within a short period, their mother’s will had disappeared and several other odd occurrences had taken place. Wouldn’t this unexpected death have caused Pons to visit the Hall posthaste? Why wait four days, during which any number of untoward events could happen? This seems very strange and unprofessional of Pons.
- Somnambulism (sleepwalking) is given as the reason for Laurel’s Stowcroft’s death. The malady is also present in *The Adventure of the Troubled Magistrate*, in which Justice Fielding Anstruther fears that he has been committing crime while in his sleep.
- Pons points out that someone was carrying a heavy object along the path. Parker points out an elementary solution: the dead woman’s body was taken back to the house that way. Pons looks at him “with a glance akin to scorn,” which Parker attributes to Pons’ vanity. Pons takes some pleasure later in pointing out to Parker that the tracks were leading *away* from the house, meaning that the doctor’s deduction was completely wrong.
- Pons deduces that the killer of Laurel Stowcroft was someone known by the dogs kept at the house since they did not bark in the night. This brings to mind Holmes’ famous “dog that did nothing in the nighttime” clue from *The Silver Blaze*. Oddly enough, Inspector Jamison was ridiculed by Pons for applying this logic in *The Adventure of the Amateur Philologist*.

- There are several cases in the Canon in which Pons knows who the guilty party is but lacks the necessary proof, forcing him to lay a trap that puts the next potential victim's life in danger. This is such a case. Two other examples are *The Adventure of the Tottenham Werewolf* and *The Adventure of the Sussex Archers*. A variation on this is when Pons puts himself out as bait to the criminal. Such cases included *Mr. Fairlie's Final Journey* and *The Adventure of the Grice-Paterson Curse*. Of course, the latter is a unique circumstance.