

A Word From Dr Lyndon Parker
In Re: Sherlock Holmes, 1945
Regarding Sherlock Holmes: The Adventures of Solar Pons

Date

Derleth/1944

Quotes

- *Fine color. Not long back from Africa, I see.*
- *Your scarab pin suggests Egypt and, if I'm not mistaken, the envelope on which you have been writing is one of Shepherd's. From Cairo, then.*

The Case

A short essay from Dr. Parker, written in 1944 to introduce the first collection of his chronicles of Solar Pons. Parker relates how he was sitting in a pub near Paddington Station when Pons entered. A waiter referred to the newcomer as 'The Sherlock Holmes of Praed St.' Pons approached Parker, told him he was looking for someone to share his lodgings and led Parker to inspect 7B Praed St.

Comments

- This essay was written in 1944, and Parker makes reference to his initial meeting with Pons as taking place "almost thirty years ago." Common usage of such a phrase would seem to indicate some time between 27 and 29 and three-quarter years. Surely if it had been 26 years, some such phrase as "just over a quarter century" or the like would have been chosen. Rounding up, thirty years would make their meeting in 1914. Twenty-seven years would be 1917.

Yet Basil Copper (1919) and Robert Patrick (1921) discount Parker's entry here. Looking at all available data from the Pontine Canon, we must assume that like his Boswellian predecessor, Parker changed and/or made mistakes with dates in his published tales and they cannot be completely reconciled.

The topic has been discussed ad infinitum (or ad nauseum for some) in regards to the Canon and will not be debated here. However, it is also possible that an elderly Parker simply had trouble recalling the exact details in his dotage. The scene might well exist perfectly clearly in his mind, but the time could be clouded by a year or three. How many of us have forgotten anniversaries or even events from a short time back? It is the event itself that is of most important to Praed Street fans.

- Parker writes that Pons "had already established for himself a reputation for skill and intelligent sleuthing for which he was held in high regard by many persons connected with Scotland Yard and his Majesty's government.
- Pons' private practice covered the years 1907 – 1939. Since the Chronologies state that Pons and Parker met in either 1919 or 1921, the reference to 'His

Majesty' must refer to King George V, who ruled England from 1910 – 1936, at which time he died of bronchitis.

- The first exchange between Pons and Parker is clearly a tribute to Holmes and Watson's first encounter in the basement of St. Bart's. Though the specifics are different, Parker feels a lack of roots similar to Watson's. Pons makes several elementary observations about Parker's recent experiences and profession. He then discusses the possibility of sharing his current lodgings (certainly prompted by a need for financial assistance) and they set off to view the rooms. Certainly most readers were discovering Parker's chronicles for the first time with the publication of this collection and the introduction established a warm and comfortable link with Sherlock Holmes.
- Parker writes, "And within a few months I had begun to take notes on Pons' cases, at first for my own edification, the better to observe his methods, and then ultimately because I felt that some day these curious adventure might quite conceivably be of interest to a larger public, if presented in some more readable fashion."

Ignoring the incredible length of that sentence, it is intriguing that Parker references a notebook begun shortly after moving in with Pons. In 1965, at least a portion of the notebooks would come to light, included in a collection entitled *Praed Street Papers*, from August Derleth. Five cases are mentioned in the notebook: *The Curate's Mistake*, *The Perfect Signatures*, *The Merstham Tunnel Murder*, *The Stevenson Quote* and *The Book-Seller's Clerk*.

The first publication of a Pons case from Dr. Parker's pen was *The Adventure of the Black Narcissus*, in 1929. The earliest case to eventually be published was *The Adventure of the Sotheby Salesman*, from mid-August of 1920 (Copper) or August of 1921 (Patrick).

Two further authentic excerpts from Parkers' notebooks, covering February 1-11, 1920 and February 15-24, 1920, were published in the *Praed Street Dossier Annuals* in 1970 and 1971. The notebooks are most intriguing not because of the case references, but for the commentaries by Pons. For example, he says to Parker, "Yet circumstantial evidence is the strongest of all possible evidence." This is in contrast to Sherlock Holmes, who says it is very tricky and can point to something different when one changes his point of view.

Pons also espouses punishment first, then rehabilitation. Overall, the notebooks provide some fascinating insights into the character of Solar Pons.