

Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question April 5th, 2012

Date of next meeting

Thursday, June 7th, at 6:30 p.m. at:
The Westmount Public Library (Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Westmount, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

“The Veiled Lodger” (originally
scheduled for the April meeting),
prepared by Roger Burrows

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, April 5th, 2011 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Rachel Alkallay, Paul Billette, Louise Corda, David Dowse, Susan Fitch, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Erica Penner, Karl J. Raudsepp, Lawrence Reich, Ron Zilman, plus the following guests (see item 2 below): Tash Akkerman, Anne Bardages, Fanny Blanchet, Geneviève Dubuc, and Kayla Pieceitis

Regrets: Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, Elliott Newman

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:30 by Sovereign Ron Zilman.

**Important Note from Sub-Scribe
(i.e., lower than lowly)**

My apologies to anyone at our last meeting if I misquoted you or failed to take note of your excellent, thought-provoking comments. I am a bit rusty in taking meeting minutes, for those of you too young to remember Jerome the Giraffe's friend.

I am sure that when my notes are worked up, on, and over, by our official Lowly Scribe, my crystal-clear messages and instructions will transmogrify into the usual murky confusion which so often has typified the minutes we have been receiving.

I am quite aware that once I have handed over my meticulously-gleaned notes, our Lowly Scribe will have his way with them, and there is a strong possibility that he will convolute hopelessly my notations taken meticulously with an Omas red Paragon fountain pen, filled with velvety, exquisite Noodler's purple ink.

Good Luck To Us All – Sub-Scribe, AKA David Dowse

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Here and There, Gone and Away, Ottawa and New York)

1. This Meeting's Scheduled Toast Presenters

Since your Lowly Scribe was not at the April 5th meeting, Ron Zilman's toast to The Society is somewhere out in the ether-world, between a Sherlockian clue and a Moranic hard place, for which your L.S. apologizes.

2. New Sherlockian Group in Montreal; emissaries visit Bimetallica

A Sherlockian organization comprised of university students had five of its members visiting our meeting to find out what we were all about. As much as they were curious about us, it is fair to assume that we were interested in them too. After all, it is not every day that we are told that there are kindred spirits down the road, so to speak, at McGill University. Having found us on the internet, the five members of *Sherlockians Montreal* decided to pay a call. As a group, they are fascinated with the new British Sherlock Holmes series starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman; so much so, that they have been putting up posters around the city publicizing it. Our own David Dowse challenged them to get a better name for their group, and to learn the origins of our organization's name.

3. The Feast of Kings and Queens

Chris Herten-Greaven again raided the larder and subjected us to the euphoria of magnificent fare in the form of smoked sturgeon, mozzarella cheese, paté, quince jelly, and crackers. Thanks again, Chris.

4. Ants: 10, Grasshoppers: 0

Paul Billette asked for the authority to reserve the Atwater Club for our next Birthday dinner in January. The response was a unanimous go-ahead, so he will take care of the arrangements with the club for approximately the same date as our recent event. We will be setting up a committee to work out the details of the menu, price, entertainment, guest speaker, etc.

5. Getting Acquainted – All Over Again

Since we had the influx of five young ladies at our meeting, our Sovereign, Ron Zilman, felt it was a good idea to ask them and all of our own members to describe briefly our backgrounds and how we each came to become disciples of The Master. Chris Herten-Greaven got the ball rolling by explaining his roots in forensic dentistry, to help identify people whose remains had been found in plane crashes. Karl Raudsepp, our most recent member, told of his love of chess. He is a music professor at John Abbott CEGEP and restores pipe organs as a hobby. Ron Zilman is an accountant and enjoys how Holmes uses his powers of observation; for example, in “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle.” Our remaining attendees, Raf Jans, Rachel Alkallay, Paul Billette, Joan O’Malley, Lawrence Reich, David Dowse, Erica Penner, Susan Fitch, and Louise Corda all took turns outlining their paths to Holmesdom in general and The Bimetallic Question in particular.

6. Down in the Valley

Chris Herten-Greaven showed us two magazine-type catalogues of tools and accessories for carpentry and woodworking published by Lee Valley. He also let us handle a small metal device called a Maple Leaf web Saw-Joiner and asked if anyone knew what it was or what it was used for. Accurate answers were not exactly forthcoming, so we were charged with the responsibility of finding out before the next meeting. Since your Lowly Scribe was not at the meeting, and did not see the hand tool, he has nothing but a name to go by. We are familiar with the name of Lee Valley, a national chain of high-end hand tools and cabinet-making accessories, including fittings for burial caskets. The internet was not generous in providing the definition of a web saw, but when one takes the combination of “saw” and “joiner” or “jointer” in tandem, one is reminded of a dovetail saw, the ideal implement for cutting dovetail joints, up to knock-out with a chisel. We take it that “Maple Leaf” might be a brand or product name, under the Lee Valley umbrella. Our curiosity is more than piqued.

7. Heads Up!

Karl Raudsepp said he had acquired a small porcelain head of Sherlock Holmes with a porcelain pipe dangling from his porcelain mouth. The figurine is stamped “W. Ray Bossons – Artware of England.” According to Google, W. Ray Bossons is the son of William Henry Bossons, “a retired pottery manufacturer who started making metal Christmas figurines as a hobby in 1944. The success of his tiny figures, which he sold door to door, led him to open the Bossons factory in 1946. Located in Congleton, Cheshire, England, the Bossons factory was family run (William’s son W. Ray Bossons took over in 1951 when William died) until 1996 when it finally closed. Throughout its 50-year history the factory specialized in character wall masks and other artware products that were all hand-painted with an incredible eye for detail. Upon its closing the Bosson family made it known that none of the names or molds to their products would ever be sold to another company for reproduction, nor are there any plans ever to resume production.” It would appear that Bosson figurines are increasing in value as collectors’ items.

On his side, David Dowse also has a Sherlockian head. This one is sculpted from chalk, and also painted. Obviously, it is much more delicate than Bossons’ porcelain art ware and one must resist the temptation to scratch hop-scotch diagrams on the sidewalk with it.

8. Momentous Date

According to some commentators, April 5th, the date of our meeting, marks the 118th anniversary of *The Empty House*, although as with most other cases a variety of dates have been put forward. Karl Raudsepp told us of a new Sherlock Holmes play to be put on this fall at the Segal Center, starring Montrealer Jay Baruchel and also featuring Karl's son. Karl will give us more information as it becomes available, which we will be eager to include in our minutes.

9. First Toast – To the Master

by Susan Fitch

What is the next best thing to a new Sherlock Holmes adventure recorded by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or Dr. Watson? Answer: A Sherlockian pastiche written by one of our own members, past Sovereign Patrick Campbell. As the action Patrick's 1999 novel and play, Tides of the Wight begins, we find Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in the familiar sitting room at 221B Baker Street. It is 1884. Their crime-solving partnership and friendship are still relatively new. Let's eavesdrop for a moment on their conversation:

Holmes: Have you thought of going back into practice?

Watson: Not really, it's only recently I've been fit enough, and it would require far more money than I could afford to be able to buy into a practice.

Holmes: Then we'll have you with us for some time then?

Watson: Yes, Holmes, if I'm needed. Is there some way I can help?

Holmes: Only in the ways that have been so useful to me. You have been a stalwart companion, a willing listener to my theories as they develop, an unbiased critic, and a dutiful recorder of events, even though I find your literary style to be somewhat rather more florid than factually accurate. Ah yes, and it is often of some comfort to have a medical man close at hand!

Watson: And one with a pistol!

Holmes: Yes, that too, particularly one with the foresight to carry a pistol, and the wisdom not to use it, except as a last resort.

Watson: I am pleased and flattered that you value my company, Holmes, but is this all leading up to some new and unprecedented request?

Holmes: Heavens no; I have been somewhat idle of late, and you know how easily I become bored. The most useful thing you could do at the moment is to find me a client with an interesting and potentially profitable case.

Watson: I'm afraid I seldom mix among the criminal classes.

Holmes: *Au contraire*, Watson; while you do little socializing, there are rogues of every stripe all around us. No class in Britain has a monopoly on virtue, or a particular tendency towards crime. Any man, or any woman, could be driven to crime, the most heinous crime, under certain circumstances. The apparent predominance of the lower classes in the courts and the prisons of Britain results from those classes' being more likely to be forced into illegal deeds, more likely to be caught, and less able to defend themselves; or they are unable to retain an adequate defense. The middle classes, in general, are smart enough to keep within the letter of the law, even when they swindle their fellow man on a daily basis.

Watson: And the ruling classes; what of them?

Holmes: The crimes they commit are of such size and scope that they can seldom be held individually accountable. A large company can devastate the economy of a small county without ever running afoul of the law.

Watson: A somewhat cynical view of life, surely.

Holmes: But an accurate one, believe me; for I make my living by watching these dramas play themselves out on the human stage.

Hmm...Here we are in 2012, and we might reflect that the more things change, the more they stay the same. It's a lucky thing for the world we live in today, that Holmes and Watson are still on the case, inspiring writers, crime-solvers, and – not to mention – actors, everywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen of the society, let us raise our glasses to three things: to crime-solving, to friendship, and to the timeless wisdom of the Master!

10. Trotting the Boards

Susan Fitch gave us an update on the presentation by our Society of the Sherlock Holmes play, *Tides of the Wight* by our own Patrick Campbell. The plan includes a reading of the first two acts, a break, and then the final two acts. About 15 people are required for the cast. We will solicit these from our members at our meetings. The play reading will be performed at the Green Center, 1090 Green Avenue. We invite all interested parties to make themselves known at our meeting, and not disappear into the laneways of London quite just yet.

11. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Roger Burrows, read by Karl Raudsepp

Some of you here this evening may be old enough to remember David Letterman. I shamelessly borrow from him to present:

The Top 10 Reasons We Like Dr. Watson

- Number 10. We never know where his old army wound will show up next.
- Number 9. While not himself luminous, he is a conductor of light.
- Number 8. He's not named Ormond Sacker.
- Number 7. He always prescribes brandy.
- Number 6. He knows all about the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant.
- Number 5. The fair sex is his department.
- Number 4. He has a pawky sense of humour.
- Number 3. We can't wait to open that travel-worn and battered tin dispatch box.
- Number 2. There is no man who is better worth having at your side when you are in a tight place.

And the number one reason we like Dr. Watson:

- We wish we could stand in his shoes for just one minute.

Please raise your glasses to Dr. Watson!

12. The Quizless (Unquizzical?) Society

There was no quiz on “The Veiled Lodger” or any other lodger this meeting, since Roger Burrows, the quizmaster of the evening, had hurt his leg, and Marie and he could not make it in, since the walk from Ottawa was a little arduous under the circumstances.

Rather, an animated discussion of the story took place, which is always a preferable alternative to the quiz, since this should improve each participant’s comprehension and recall of the story. However, since what’s sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander, this general raising of the tide applies to all those present, which theoretically means that no one person would have the advantage over any other when it comes to the test. But we Sherlockians are a humble lot. We take the bit between our teeth and write those tests not for the glory or the thrill of blood, but for the simple and unassuming love of learning.

In the discussion, we learned that Prussic Acid, or Hydrogen Cyanide, leaves a smell of bitter almonds on the breath of its no-longer-extant victim. There is no other poison or substance that leaves this odor.

In addition, it is hard to understand clearly Holmes’s state-of-mind at the beginning of this story. Watson writes, “I found him seated in a smoke-laden atmosphere ...” presumably from his own pipe-smoking. Yet, he snaps at Watson, “Mrs. Merrilow does not object to tobacco, Watson, if you wish to indulge your filthy habits.” We find it difficult to understand this contradiction in Holmes who gives himself permission to smoke, yet berates his friend for the same practice.

According to some, Doyle’s authorship of this story must go undisputed because of the passage, “‘Poor girl!’ he said. ‘Poor girl! The ways of *Fate* are indeed hard to understand. If there is not some *compensation hereafter*, then the world is a cruel jest.’”

Through the introduction of the concept of *fate*, we may wish to consider the history of the Three Fates. These are three sisters, the Moirai of Greek Mythology, the white-robed incarnations of Destiny. They are:

- Clotho: she spins the thread of life
- Lachesis: she measures the length of each thread of life
- Atropos: she has two responsibilities: (a) she determines the manner of death; and (b) she cuts the thread of life with her shears

Notice how we have adopted their names as the roots of certain of our own words, of course filtered through intervening Romance languages, before arriving on our tongues:

- Clotho = cloth, made from thread
- Lachesis = lacerate, cutting off (ouch)
- Atropos = wear out, deteriorate, a shadow of impending death, certainly a symptom of disability

We also considered the origin of the Abbas Parva

- in Berkshire
- could it be an abbey of a Catholic monastery in the district of Parva?
- fictitious village

David Dowse likes the introduction of the story best because:

- it lays down some ground rules for the methods by which Holmes will take up a case
- “discretion and high sense of honour which have always distinguished my friend are still at work in the choice of these memoirs”
- “Sometimes he had with much effort to pick the fruit, sometimes it fell easily into his lap.”

Question: Was plastic surgery available at that time (1896) to help Mrs. Ronder?

Chris Herten-Greaven explained that no, it was not. The real beginning of plastic surgery was after World War II.

Since young Edmunds of the Berkshire Constabulary was later sent to Allahabad, this gave rise to a discussion on the Royal Berkshire Regiment and Allahabad:

- Watson was “removed” from his brigade and attached to the Berkshires, formally known as the Princess Charlotte of Wales Royal Berkshire Regiment.
- Where and what is Allahabad?
 - It means “settled by God” in Persian
 - One of the main holy cities of Hinduism
 - Active in the Indian mutiny
 - A major city in the north of India
- Why was Edmunds sent to Allahabad?
 - Was it a promotion in rank?
 - Was he sent there to get him away from England for some reason?
 - How could he benefit ££ from going to Allahabad?
 - Did he go with the army?

A note about the story: It is very short, only 4491 words. Why did Doyle write it?

- Perhaps just to crank out another Holmes “adventure” to make some ££?
- Somebody had whispered “movie rights”
- He had recently received a shipment of Noodler’s ink (purple)
- He had the itch
- He reasoned that you could never have enough of SH

Who or what was “Sahara King?”

- a North African Lion
- a Barbary Lion
- an Atlas Lion
- a Nubian Lion
- a one-speed bicycle with a foot brake; this lion became extinct in the early 20th century when the last tire blew
- last known specimen was shot in the Atlas Mountains in 1922
- largest and heaviest of all African lions; the males went up to 510 lbs.
- did not live in prides due to the scarcity of food in their habitat
- were often kept in zoos, menageries, and hotels
- two were kept in the Tower of London

13. Third Toast – To the Woman

by Raf Jans

We all know Irene Adler. As Watson writes, ‘There was but one woman to Sherlock Holmes, and that woman was the late Irene Adler.’ But here is a mystery for you: if she is so important, why is she not mentioned more?

I have read and heard many times that *A Scandal in Bohemia* is the only adventure in which she is mentioned. This is not completely true.

First of all, in *A Case of Identity*, Sherlock Holmes refers to this adventure as ‘the case of the Irene-Adler papers’. Unfortunately, no additional information is provided, so we do not get more insight into this intriguing character.

Second, in *The Five Orange Pips*, we find the following conversation between Holmes and a client:

‘He said that you could solve anything.’

‘He said too much.’

‘That you are never beaten.’

‘I have been beaten four times – three times by men and once by a woman.’

Do we have here another reference to Irene Adler? A quick look at the dates tells us that *The Five Orange Pips* is set in September 1887, whereas *A Scandal in Bohemia* starts on the 20th of March 1888. At first sight, this explicit dating of the cases excludes the possibility that Holmes is referring here to Irene Adler. Who then is this woman that has beaten Sherlock Holmes? Some have suggested that Mrs. Munro of *The Yellow Face* is a good candidate. The timing of this case is unsure, but Sherlock was certainly mistaken. Remember ‘*Norbury*’. Sherlock Holmes thought that Mrs. Munro was hiding an extra-marital affair, whereas she was actually hiding her child from her previous marriage. But even if Sherlock Holmes was not able to crack this case, can we really say that he was beaten by Mrs. Munro? Not everyone agrees with this suggestion and many still believe that Holmes refers in the above dialogue to Irene Adler. It has been pointed out many times that Dr. Watson was extremely unreliable when it comes to dating the cases. For example, Bell and Baring-Gould put *The Five Orange Pips* after *A Scandal in Bohemia*, and proclaim that Holmes is clearly referring to Irene Adler. But then again, Holmes says that he has been beaten by a woman. He does not say by *the* woman.

Probably we shall never know the truth. But it only makes the enigma of Irene Adler more mysterious. And that surely is what Sherlock Holmes wanted.

So I propose a toast to *the* woman.

14. Don’t Smoke if You’re a King

The last three kings of England died as a result of smoking.

15. You are cordially invited ...

**Mr. & Mrs. Jacob Abramson
request the pleasure of your company
for Afternoon Tea at their home,
13 Dephoure,
Dollard des Ormeaux
at four o'clock
on Sunday, the 10th of June, 2012
Kindly respond to clz_abramson@yahoo.com
Period Dress.**

16. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Rachel Alkallay, impromptu

Showing Mrs. H. as a mother figure to Holmes & Watson.

17. More Notes on Abbas Parva

“The case worried me at the time, Watson. Here are my marginal notes to prove it. I confess that I could make nothing of it. And yet I was convinced that the coroner was wrong. Have you no recollection of the Abbas Parva tragedy?”

With just the mention of the name of Abbas Parva, Sherlock Holmes comes a-running. Why did he not solve the mystery in the first place? Were his deductive reasoning skills not fully developed? Since no one called him in on the case, he did not feel that he could get involved.

18. More Information for Nut Lovers

Here is further research on cyanide poisoning, which should be of considerable assistance to those interested in doing away with loved ones.

“A pleasant almondy odour rose when I opened it ...”

First, the best and only symptom of cyanide poisoning is the smell of bitter almonds on the victim’s facial breathing apparatus. In the real world, hydrogen cyanide is often undetectable until 600 parts per billion, which is a rather high and dangerous concentration. Bitter almonds is a peculiar, uncommon smell. It smells very different from sweet or regular almonds, so most people do not know what the smell is. The connection between bitter almonds and cyanide is that almonds do contain cyanide; notably, sweet almonds smell of benzaldehyde. Most lay people do not understand the difference between bitter and sweet almonds, and by the time they figure it out, it’s too late. Cyanide, in fact, is a component of fruits, grain, and some legumes with which we are quite familiar: apples, peaches, apricots, lima beans, barley, sorghum, flaxseed, and bamboo shoots. Cyanide is in all these plants for reasons that are, to paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, “Evolutionary, my dear Watson”; the plants have an ingenious poison delivery system to discourage herbivores and insects from eating them. We humans are too smart for all that. We eat them anyway. We know full well (or we do now) that cyanogenic glycoside is stored in one compartment in the plant cell and

an enzyme that activates it is stored in another compartment. When an animal chews the plant and crushes the compartment, the two chemicals mix, making cyanide from the sugar. It is like breaking a glow stick to mix the chemicals that make the stick fluorescent. What this has to do with the song, "You Light Up My Life," is a mystery to us, but we are working on it.

Cyanide Booby Trap: Cyanide acts as a poison to people by preventing cells from using oxygen. It is a molecular form of asphyxiation. Aha! Now you know more than a few of those irritating and inconvenient members of your family or condo block do.

19. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

Due to the crush of events at this meeting, we omitted to take down the names of some of June's presenters. You will be contacted to ensure that toasts will be delivered!

| | | |
|----------------|---|------------------------------|
| To the Master | - | ? |
| To Dr. Watson | - | ? |
| To the Woman | - | David Dowse |
| To Mrs. Hudson | - | ? |
| To the Society | - | Susan Fitch and Nitika Dosaj |

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favour upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, June 7th, 2012, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to:

<http://www.bimetallicquestion.org>