

MINUTES
of the Meeting
of the
BIMETALLIC QUESTION
August 7, 2014

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, **October 2nd, 2014**
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 Disappearance of
Lady Frances Carfax”**
prepared by
Raf Jans

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August 7th, 2014 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Tash Akkerman, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Paul Billette, Patrick Campbell, M.B., Louise Corda, Wilfrid deFreitas, David Dowse, Kristen Franseen, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Thomas Jans, Anne Millar, Kayla Piecaitis, Carole Rocklin, Arlene Scher, Bruno Stenson, Ronnie Zilman

Guests: Nathalie Ellis

Regrets: None ☺!

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order *promptly* at 6:30 by Sovereign Chris Herten-Greaven.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating October and Apples, Murder and Mayhem, Marple and The Dame)

1. Every word a gem

In anticipation of an absolutely stellar, *nonpareil* meeting, our keen gang of co-conspirators asked our beloved and – yea – much-cherished sovereign to speak louder if only that he might be heard by the boundless throng of Sherlockian acolytes who were poised, if not actually thrust, at the edge of their seats awaiting such pearls of wisdom and gems of disclosure as would create the world’s most valuable and intriguing necklace.

2. In the “Identification of Estimable Personages” Department

In our previous issue of these truncated Minutes, we told you about a Belgian businessman who had risen to a position of power and influence in world trade. Since your Lowly Scribe did not have his spelling down correctly, it was not possible to find out more about him. Now, thanks to broad and generous input from our Spelling Police, we were able to find out more about Émile Francqui. The most surprising thing about him is his remarkable resemblance to the actor David Suchet’s persona as the transplanted Belgian Inspector Poirot which you may see on Wikipedia. Francqui served as a commercial emissary under King Leopold II, and later, the monarch’s son Leopold III who requested that Francqui set up a structure to improve the health of the population of the Belgian Congo. This resulted in the foundation “Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine” in 1931, in which Francqui served as its first president. Before we shower

Franqui and his liege with too many embarrassing accolades, we must remember that the international community had been after Belgium for its dastardly, inhumane, and exploitative treatment of the natives of the territory. The atrocities committed in the name of progress in that hidden corner of the world were quite extraordinary. We get a sense of this in Joseph Conrad's story, "An Outpost of Progress," set in the Belgian Congo, in which the attitudes of the Belgian low-lives, Kayerts and Carlier, typify the regard of the white and "civilized" peoples towards African natives. Those of us with a literary bent will recognize this novella as the template for Conrad's longer work, *Heart of Darkness* in which the "darkness," a prominent theme in the novella, is the mysterious evil lurking in the heart of man which finds affirmation as man descends into the heart of the Dark Continent. Francqui was fortunately enough to have a ship named after him, which was eventually torpedoed and destroyed. Poetic – or Conradian? – justice?

3. His Last Comma

Regarding your Lowly Scribe's comment regarding appositions and juxtapositions and various positions in the last (for want of a better word) Minutes, Chris Herten-Greaven acknowledged that "punctuation is important." This was seconded by David Dowse, who averred that it is important in the name of our society. What ponderous and wonderfully pendulous thoughts.

Remember when speaking, folks, to insert pauses (pregnant or eerie) in your sentences so we can quickly and efficiently assign antecedents in our brain and avoid the embarrassing smudges of mistaken identity and improperly assigned descriptors. For example:

"I (breath) upon whom this unprecedented honor was bestowed (breath) will be only too pleased (pause: dot-dot-dot) to take out the garbage."

This will add color to your life, and remove unwanted confusion.

4. Sherlock in LawLaw Land

Chris recently attended a Sherlockian meeting in Los Angeles on June 28 where they had a quiz on "The Mystery of the Second Stain." That society is concerned with the releasing of copyright material of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, which they family has been fighting against in all cases. Wilfrid de Freitas stated that the ruling to keep the control within the family will be appealed and will most likely be found in favor of the public domain. The appeal is being led by Leslie Klinger, the California-based compiler of the mammoth "Annotated" Sherlock Holmes.

5. I Left My Heart in a High Rise

At the LA meeting, Chris learned that there is a reproduction of 221B Baker Street in a San Francisco high rise. To the LA meeting, he brought a sample of ice cider, a Robertson screw and screw driver (unavailable in the US which has opted, rather, for round-holed screws and screw drivers when eagles are not available to grasp things For Freedom), and Patrick Campbell's birthday poem, none of which items had been available in the US up to that point.

Later in the meeting, Chris showed us a menu from John O'Groats Restaurant in Encino, CA, in the home town of The Curious Collectors of Baker Street. Why in the world would anyone name a restaurant after one of the most desolate places on this planet? Due south of the Orkney Islands, at the northeastern tip of Scotland, the place is named after one Jan deGroot, from the Netherlands, who was given permission to operate a ferry between that place and the Orkney Islands.

Chris also showed us a Sherlockian book of days (a calendar), perhaps symbolic of the seemingly interminable sea passage to the Orkneys when the waters run high.

6. A New Twist on Quizzes

In LA, the quiz takes place in a circle. We are not told who draws the circle. Each person, in turn, is given an opportunity to answer the question. Those who cannot answer, or respond incorrectly, are eliminated. Because of the society's proximity to Hollywood, a dramatic device is used to dispense with those who are eliminated from the quiz. We will leave it to your imagination to fill in the blanks. Off to the side, away from the gore, there was a table of Sherlockiana for sale. Chris bought an Inspector Morse tie which is efficacious for the neck when not wound too tightly. Wilfrid observed that "this shows there is a Sherlockian freemasonry around the world." Carole Rocklin asked how many were in their society, and Chris responded that there were 20-25 people at the meeting.

7. Sherlockian Holy Water

Our society, the world-famous Bimetallic Question, has the distinction of having installed a brass plaque into the rock at Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland, where Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty, locked in Mortal Kombat, plunged into the spume and presumably, perished. From that event, Patrick Campbell still has a small bottle of water. It remains full, unevaporated, non-cruddy, and clear, as if it were destined to perform miracles.

8. More Poetic Precision

A propos our previous Minutes' mention of Patrick Campbell's meeting with various celebrities from Russia, Patrick clarified that the inscription of his book of poems by Yevgeny Yevtuchenko reads: "To Patrick, with my deep respect." In keeping with his customary modesty, our present-day Renaissance Man, Patrick, omitted to read the words "adulation," "admiration," "awe," and a few other *bons mots* which were similarly appreciative.

9. First Toast – To the Master

by David Dowse

The reason Sherlock Holmes is so popular is that his words and language enrich English literature. Here are more than one memorable aphorism and turn of speech.

- "You know my methods, Watson."
- "A long shot, Watson, a very long shot."
- "... a little monograph on the hundred and fourteen varieties of tobacco ash."
- "These are deep waters, Watson."
- "Excellent!" Cried Mr. Acton.
"But very superficial," said Holmes."
- "Excellent!" I cried.
'But very superficial,' said he."
- "It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognize out of a number of facts, which are incidental and which are vital."
- "You mentioned your name as if I should recognize it, but beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason, and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you." (SH is too modest. He would at least have been able to ascertain the person's age, unless he was leaving that to Thomas Jans who would have no problem doing so.)
- "Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you."
- Nor must we forget that delightful form of riposte which Father Ronald Knox has wittily christened the "Sherlockismus."
- "I would call your attention to the curious incident of the dog in the night time."
"The dog did nothing in the night time."
"That was the curious incident."
His language adds flavor and lifts the story out of the fantastic and gives it a solid reality.

I give you Sherlock Holmes!

10. Book and Police Trivia

Jack Anderson informed us that the large downtown store of Chapters will close in October. As a former manager of Chapters in the West Island, Jack knows books, collecting, and the retail book market very well. He said, and we quote: "It's not the complexity of a book that shows its value, but what it brings to you." He talked about the series of Shire books. Their format is very small, but they are informative and interesting. For example, *The Victorian Detective* by Alan Moss and Keith Skinner, is a valuable mini-tome by two authors who possess vast and deep knowledge on Scotland Yard. At one point, Jack said, half the detectives in Scotland Yard were up on corruptions charges.

11. *Le Plus Que Ça Change ...*

Chris pointed out that some of the tragedies of the past are alive and well today; for example, the movie *Philomena* recounts outrageous conditions from long ago. It depicts the story of an Irish woman's search for her son who was taken away from her decades before, after she became pregnant as a young teenager, and was forced to live in a convent.

12. A Connection of Names

Chris showed us an autobiography of Sir John William Dawson, a professor of Geology and principal of McGill University from 1855 to 1893. A lifelong educator, Dawson played a pivotal role in developing an improved schooling system in Nova Scotia, from the little home on the hill overlooking the dock where the replicated *Hector* is moored, reminding us of the early days of Scottish emigration to the New World. It would not be until September 26, 1945 that McGill University would memorialize Dawson with a campus of his own, this time as an overflow campus to accommodate soldiers returning from WWII. Its first location was at the Air Force base at St-Jean-Sur-Richelieu. It transformed to a pre-university college, and moved into Montreal, and finally, to its present main location in the former Mother House at the corner of Sherbrooke and Atwater Streets in 1988. The final consolidation of campuses took place in 1997, with a few classrooms established on the fourth floor of the renovated Montreal Forum in 2010.

Bruno Stenson, who works at the Redpath Museum at McGill University, informed us that the museum was built in 1892 as an inducement to keep Sir William Dawson in Montreal. Apparently, it worked, since Dawson remained at the university for another year. The Redpath was a gift of the sugar baron, Peter Redpath, whose paper bags of sugar are continuing to spill little white granules on our shelves, floors, and tables to this very day.

13. More Timeless Words

Louise Corda shared with us a quotation gleaned from a local newspaper, ascribed to Sherlock Holmes: "It is one of those cases where the art of the reasoner should be used rather for the sifting of details than for the acquiring of fresh evidence."

14. Sherlock is Serious Business

Thomas Jans showed us a board book (illustrated novel) on *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in which the characters are portrayed by Sesame Street figures. Very heavy! More, Thomas, we want more!

15. Antiquarians in the Agora

Wilfrid informed us that there was to be a sale by antiquarian booksellers in the lobby of Concordia University's Hall Building on de Maisonneuve, September 27-28. Caveat Emptor: *You will buy!*

16. Up, Down, and Sideways

Bruno, who works with the past, and is clearly in the present, had several points of vital information for us which we will find indispensable in our daily contemplations and perusals when delving into the Zen of Sherlock Holmes. The core information is from Bruno, while the comments are from the *doppelganger* sitting next to the left ear of your Lowly Scribe:

- China had a wheelchair in the third century
- The wheelchair didn't make it to Europe until the 15th century. Apparently, the terrain was bumpy, and there were problems with the design and chassis; also, wheels were less than perfect; the wooden ones fell apart too easily unless they were racing on the flat track inside the Roman forum (or doing drag races in the Holy City); and spokes? Fogeddaboudit!
- There was actually an elevator in Greece in the third century.
- Otis invented the safety elevator. Its main feature was that to be perfectly safe, you stayed away from overhead pianos and remained perfectly still until it passed.
- Early elevators were attached to the outside of buildings, like a symbiotic box. This was very frustrating if you were the elevator. The movement options were quite limited: up-down-up-down, etc., although the view was better than nowadays. Unless you are in a crowded elevator being pressed together, and you don't care about the view. Under certain conditions: who is doing the pressing and how old is she?
- The first building in the whole, wide world to have an elevator shaft was in New York City in 1856, and guess what? Yep! People learned the hard way to wait for the arrival of the elevator before stepping into it.
- Montreal boasts the only intersection in North America where there is architecture from four centuries: if you stand at the gate of Notre Dame Cathedral in Old Montreal, you will see this phenomenon. People come here for this. Why? Because the Spaghetti Factory is only blocks away.
Thank you, Bruno. This was fun.

17. Hiatus Adventures Gone Wild

Anne Millar brought in a book she found in an antique shop in North Hatley, being surprised in the traditional manner by falling objects from above. So, where did Sherlock Holmes go during his hiatus years? An American comic author, John Kendrick Bangs, now much neglected but famous in his time, filled in the gap—unfortunately taking Doyle's word on the events at Reichenbach as truth *before* the great reveal of *The Empty House*. How do you solve a mystery in Hades, where the shades of persons real and fictional mingle in *bonhomie* not too dissimilar from the doings of the Society? Call upon the ostensibly dead famous sleuth! And where has the gentlemen's club *A Houseboat On The Styx* gone?

It's a good question as questions go. Unfortunately, the LS was otherwise engaged and missed most of it. Here is the part he noted down, which fortunately is the Conclusion: "...the ladies stole the houseboat because they were tired of being excluded from the gentlemen's club ..."

In keeping with the psychology of perception, this was what he heard; it might not have been what was spoken.

Apparently this riddle caused Rachel Alkallay to say, "... things to worry/not worry about if you go to hell ...", a oft-told tale well-told. Fascinating. And your LS is very worried.

18. A Near-Victorian Cookbook

Anne also showed us a cookbook from the time of the First World War, which was, she said, as close as she could get to authentic Victorian recipes. As mentioned above, she had been in North Hatley for the week-end, which was settled by Scots, nowadays provoking much chattering over the peculiar spellings of inscriptions in book flyleaves.

19. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

By Ron Zilman

(Read from printout of "BBC News – Sherlock Holmes' Dr. Watson was 'based on Dundee doctor' and rewritten by LS)

A traditional interpretation from Holmes's first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, suggests that then Surgeon-Major Alexander Francis Preston may have been the model for Dr. Watson, as their experiences in the Afghan war were similar. However, the recent revelation that Dr. Watson was based on Dundee's William Smith,

an osteopath, has cast new light on who may have been the true inspiration for the famous sleuth's companion.

The recent revelation began with a 1938 article which had gone neglected for nearly eight decades. The article, written by Cuthbert Smith, claimed that it was his father who was the model for Dr. Watson. More recently, Osteopath Tim Baker recognized the name of William Smith, whom he knew had a practice in Dundee in the early 20th Century, and had begun his practice in the 1880s. When Dr. Smith was studying in Edinburgh, he met Dr. Joseph Bell, the man who inspired Arthur Conan Doyle to create Sherlock Holmes. Quite definitely, Cuthbert Smith, who lived in Dundee before moving to the US and settling in Des Moines, wrote, "The detective's companion Watson was my father William Smith." He added that Doyle and his father had marveled at Dr. Bell's talents and had asked permission to base a detective character on him. Dr. Bell not only agreed but also offered many helpful suggestions on how the character should be portrayed. Dr. John Watson, a South sea doctor who served time in Manchuria and was an acquaintance of Doyle, has been linked to the character.

To Dr. Watson!

20. Quality, Not Quantity

David Dowse informed us that Miss Marple, the jowly (at least according to Margaret Rutherford) sleuth created by Dame Agatha Christie, appears in only 13 stories. David showed us a book condensing all 13 stories. Rachel explained that often, it's a question of quality over quantity in books, television, and other media.

21. The Speckled Antique

Raf Jans's father sent him an installment of "The Speckled Band" from a Dutch newspaper, dated October 21, 1916.

22. Of Historical Note, in *Real* Time

According to Chris, Sherlock Holmes was linked with events in Russia in the 1880s:

1. The attempted assassination of the Governor of Petersburg by a lady;
2. A band of nihilists who tried to derail a train carrying the czar and the royal family back from Crimea.

Since Chris has solid evidence that Sherlock Holmes was involved in both of these events on the side of Justice, this underscores the fact that he is certainly a flesh-and-blood human being, and *not* a fictional character. To those few misguided souls on this planet who still believe that The World's Greatest Consulting Detective was merely the figment of a would-be ophthalmologist's imagination, we say "Fie," and "Many times, Fie." In keeping with the polyvalent genius of Holmes, we can only wonder what the inducement to him might have been to open the door to the good but vocationally attention-diverted Doctor Doyle whose writings would have been to position SH in the shadow world of mere immortality while as a real, live detective, Holmes would be free to enjoy fame and notoriety, as well as the breadth of freedom and fulfillment that comes from authoring one's own movements as one reaches into the stratosphere of individuation and away from the many mirrors and prisms interposed by the erring, fallible, and self-serving writer of fiction. To turn real life into fiction? Phough! The very idea blanches the chestnuts on the Christmas fire. Holmes, we are certain, would have none of that! We have only to look at the paucity of his comments to Watson on the writing process and avoiding embellishment. No, it was Holmes and Watson, Watson and Holmes, with Doyle rapping at the window with a leaky fountain pen begging for a byline.

23. Third Toast – To the Woman

By Rebecca Stacey
Read by Anne Millar

So I wanted to do something a little different with this toast, and talk about one of the women whose life presented a possible *inspiration* for Irene Adler. Because as important and progressive as Irene Adler was in the story, more important and progressive were the women who carved up the Victorian atmosphere with their presence, attitude and personality.

One such woman, was Lola Montez, famous both for her self-created "Tarantula Dance", as well as being the inspiration for the expression "Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets", Miss Montez serves as an excellent example of what one can do if possessed of a little drive and ambition.

Born "Eliza Gilbert" Lola was the daughter of a Spanish beauty and a British soldier in Ireland in 1818. Her father was transferred to India and she spent her early years there.

Glamorous and boldly unconventional, La Lola attracted an enthusiastic following based more on her persona and her beauty. She became an actress of questionable morals and unquestionable moxy, By the time she reached San Francisco, she had been through three marriages and numerous scandals involving the likes of Ludwig I of Bavaria and composer Franz Liszt. She thrilled Gold Rush San Francisco with her amorous scandals and famously suggestive "Spider Dance." (it wasn't warmly received.) In fact, the miners booed her off the stage. She threatened to horsewhip one newspaper editor who had given her a bad review, and dared another to a duel.

In January of 1861, the *New York Times* reported that the "wonderfully chequered" career of Lola Montez had come to an end. By "wonderfully chequered" the Times meant to say that, like Irene Adler would come to do, Lola had rejected traditional Victorian social mores. She had led an unconventional life; she was the center of many scandals, travelled the world, and even incited riot. Though she was the talk of the day, the *New York Times* made her appear to be an errant sinner, rather than the hell-raising harridan that shocked the Victorian world.

So let's raise our glasses to the hellraisers and the heroines, to Irene Adler, and those like her.

24. Death in Dwelly Lane

Kristin Franseen described a book by F.V. Morely:

"The not so quiet English countryside sets the eccentric activities of Lionel Mimms, musician, mathematician and ex-master criminal who comes out of retirement to match superior wits with some notorious swindlers in the search for a missing oil certificate. This leads to the murder which involves the residents of Dwelly Lane, and an osteopath, the lovely Laura who plays a mean double bass, a murderer disguised as a Liberian javelin thrower and the goat ladies- Morwena and Hypatia make up a curious cast... An opening gambit for Christopher Morley's brother, and antic sport it is." – Kirkus reviews (novel pub. 1952)

Jack Anderson observed that this story would make a nice premise for what could be a Monty Python skit.

25. Button, Button, Who's Got the Button?

Tash Akkerman showed us a Moriarty button from the BBC series, because the Napoleon of crime really is as cute as a button.

26. Too Dinky to Live?

Patrick Campbell deemed it a "sad tale" that Jack Anderson repeatedly threw an Avro Vulcan Dinky model into a sandpit to the point that it was distressed, gouged, bruised, possibly lopsided, and definitely not feeling well. Thirty to forty years later in England, a mint and boxed model was sold for £35,000. Jack averred that old metal toy models are now worth good money. Presumably it was fun at the time.

27. Quiz: "The Adventure of the Three Students"

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prizes
1.	Raf Jans	61	All prizes were neatly wrapped, cleverly disguised books, and titles not noted
2.	Carol Abramson	59½	
3.	Anne Millar	51	

Next meeting's story: "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax"
 Prepared by: Raf Jans

28. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

By Anne Millar

Your Lowly Scribe was so enthralled, that he forgot to take notes. However, the gist of the matter was something like:

At first glance, Mrs Hudson is a woman to be admired for her staunchness in putting up with Holmes and Watson, the worst tenants in London or any other city. Assassins at the door, ladies of dubious reputation on the settee, bullet holes in window and wall, policemen drinking out of the good tea service.

But Hudson's nerves of steel are not one sided. After all, this is the one who crawls forth to adjust a trap for the second most dangerous man in London and keeps up at Baker Street (and elsewhere) through fire, blizzard, and all comers to keep our sleuth and biographer hale, hearty, and housed. Mrs Hudson is to be admired then as an adventurer in her own way. To Mrs. Hudson!

29. Fifth Toast – To the Society

By Carol Abramson

An extemporaneous address on the value of friendship, often exemplified in the activities of The Bimetallic Question. May it continue ever thus.

30. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

- To the Master - Wilfrid de Freitas
- To Dr. Watson- - Raf Jans
- To the Woman - Maureen Anderson
- To Mrs. Hudson - Natalie Ellis
- To the Society - Bruno Stenson

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favor upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, October 2nd, 2014, at 6:30 p.m. Meet like-minded Sherlockians and express opinions you would never dare to utter anywhere else. Hitching rail for Dobbin next to the little wooden house with the quarter-moon in the door. For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to www.bimetallicquestion.org

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