



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

VENATIO ADEST

Minutes of the Meeting of The Bimetallic Question October 1st, 2015

Date of our next meeting: Thursday, December 3rd, 2015 at 6:30pm at the Westmount Public Library, Westmount Room, 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, QC.

The quiz at the next meeting: *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder* - prepared by Wilfrid de Freitas.

Next meeting's toast presenters: The Master: David Dowse; Dr. Watson: Paul Billette; The Woman: Ronnie Zilman; Mrs. Hudson: Elliott Newman; The Society: Kristin Franseen.

Minutes of the meeting of the Bimetallic Question held on Thursday, October 1st, 2015 at the Westmount Public Library, Westmount Room, 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, QC.

Present: David Dowse, Elliott Newman, Chris Herten-Greaven, Susan Fitch, Louise Corda, Ronnie Zilman, Constantin Fraser, Paul Billette, Miyako Matsuda-Pelletier, Raf Jans, Bruno Paul Stenson, Wilfrid de Freitas, Kristin Franseen, Carol Abramson, Mark Altosaar, Karl J. Raudsepp.

Regrets: Patrick Campbell, Maureen "The Mink" Anderson, Jack Anderson, Kathryn Radford, Rachel Alkallay, Arlene Scher, Erica Penner, Nancy Walkling, Kevin Chappell, Derek Chappell, and our recent guest Nathalie Ellis.

Call to order: The meeting was called to order by Sovereign Carol Abramson at 6:30pm.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

Welcome to our guest!

A hearty Sherlockian welcome to our guest, Constantine Fraser. Glad you could be with us!

1. Toast to the Master by Our Co-founder, Wilfrid de Freitas

Every time I volunteer to propose a toast at one of our meetings, the first thought that crosses my mind is "What on earth can I say that hasn't been said before, and probably many times at that?" But once I start thinking about it, I find there is always some new aspect (well, new to me anyway) that I hadn't hitherto thought about. Consider how Sherlock Holmes and his adventures have inserted themselves into our everyday lives and way of thinking. Of course, I can only speak for myself but many of Holmes's sayings have left such an impression in my mind that scarcely a day goes by when one or other of them pops into my head in relation to something I'm doing, or hearing, or seeing. A few examples..."you see, but you do not observe." (SCAN) "...the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." (SILV) and "There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before." (STUD). If you think about it, I bet you'll find your own Sherlockian saying, or sayings, that have crept into your daily life - perhaps subconsciously, without your even realizing it.

Consider also the influence he has had on other writers. You may not have noticed it but what is probably Holmes's most famous utterance "The game's afoot" appears in at least two of Shakespeare's plays:

Henry IV, Part 1. Act 1, scene 3.

Before the game is afoot, thou still lett'st slip.

Henry V. Act 3, scene 1

I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'

High praise indeed from the greatest writer in the English, indeed in any, language!

So the next time our Sovereign asks for a volunteer to give a toast (as she will most surely do this evening after each toast), don't be shy; put your hand up and say "I'll do it." Once you put your mind to it, you may surprise even yourself once you start thinking about it.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you The Master.

For anyone not yet familiar with the standardized Sherlockian story abbreviations created by Jay Finley Christ, more information can be found at:

<http://ash-tree.bc.ca/CHRIST.pdf>

http://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php/Jay_Finley_Christ

2. When Is a Fountain Pen a Baton?

All assembled lauded compliments on the composer(s) of the minutes of our last Society meeting and they feel that the baton has been safely and expertly passed to the next incarnation of our Lowly Scribe.

3. From Japan with Love

A most hearty welcome to our newest member, Miyako Matsuda-Pelletier. Her presence and insightful contribution to meetings has been immediately felt. Thank you for enriching our Society.

4. Tweaking the Devil's Toe

Bruno Paul Stenson opened a small box to reveal not a *Devil's Foot*, but a *Devil's Toenail*. That is the common name for the fossil *Gryphaea*, a genus of extinct oysters, some 5 1/2 million years old.

5. A Thrilling Sherlockian Find and Victoria's Secret

Karl J. Raudsepp recently acquired, in Chapters before they closed, a copy of *The Sherlock Holmes Companion: An Elementary Guide* by Daniel Smith, Castle Books (2011) for only \$1.99. When passed around everyone was pleasantly surprised at the variety, composition and richness of the articles, images and paper and binding. A real steal of a find. Miyako also has a copy.

It was said that when that branch of Chapters on Ste. Catherine Street closed it went from *novels* to *knickers*.

6. Coin Inspired Conversation

Chris Herten-Greaven opened a treasure chest with a display of an Irish Florin coin, then 1/2 penny, 6 penny, Irish shilling and then for Raf's interest, who is of Belgian descent, a Belgian coin. The coin propelled the conversation to the Belgian Congo. Belgium swooped in and claimed the land, reaping the mineral wealth for itself and "subjugating the natives". For 30 years the territory of the Congo was not even formally a colony of Belgium, but a private fiefdom of the King, Leopold II.

Chris told us that Conan Doyle went to the Congo to write about the crimes against humanity that were committed by the Belgians, all in the name of "profit and progress". Raf recalled how the book Conan Doyle wrote on the subject is entitled *The Crime of the Congo*, (1909). If you have any difficulty obtaining a copy, it is available online as an 89 page file at:

http://www.kongo-kinshasa.de/dokumente/lekture/crime_of_congo.pdf

Chris went on to show us an 1857 Queen Victoria gold sovereign and a half sovereign from 1893, worth 10 1/2 shillings. Back when his grandmother was still doing book binding, she remembered how she had bought a whole bunch of book binding equipment including the bench, for which she paid the sum of 20 sovereigns.

7. Getting to the Bottom of Things

Bruno extended our numismatic musings by explaining the origins of the Penny Farthing bicycle. Another name for this contraption was a *velocipede* or *bum crusher* for it had no shocks or suspension and riding it on the cobbled streets and bumpy country roads it was sure to inflict serious pain to one's nethers. We also considered the origins of the name *velocipede* and its apparent evolution to the French word for bicycle, *velo*. You can see a real Penny Farthing bicycle at the Chateau Ramezay Museum, where you might encounter a distinguished gentleman who looks a lot like Bruno, acting as historian and guide. <http://www.chateauramezay.qc.ca/>

8. Montreal's Victorian Sporting Life

From bicycles the conversation morphed onto some of Montreal's old Victorian sporting clubs. The following three eventually became The Montreal Amateur Athletic Association:

- The Montreal Bicycle Club (the world's second bicycle club, and the first in North America)
- The Montreal Lacrosse Club
- and The Montreal Snowshoe Club. (the ceinture fléchée was their symbol).

It was said that the original site of the Montreal Irish Lacrosse Club was the Jean Talon Market and that the old Victoria Skating Rink, now demolished, was the site of the world's first indoor ice hockey game.

These segments of Bimetallic Question Show and Tell are an excellent example of how an object or topic can, with the interest and knowledge stored in our "little grey cells", launch our meeting to places we would never have expected to travel for the enjoyment of all and the exasperation of a recording secretary. I did my best to get it all down but be kind to me if I missed out on some vital point you wanted to make.

9. Toast to Dr. Watson by Chris Herten-Greaven

Dr. Watson is portrayed in many guises in Conan Doyle's canon; one wonders what the author had in mind. Was he the equal of ACD, on occasion, where SH commends him, sometimes even praises him, (though the reader could be forgiven for suspecting this was to "damn with faint praise" ...or is it 'feigned')? Is he a stooge, a buffoon or simply the 'straight' man to the omniscience, the memory and razor sharp mind of SH? Cf. in particular, Nigel Bruce's almost comical accompaniment of the original SH: Basil Rathbone. Again, there is the comparison to Cervantes' Don Quixote & Sancho Panza, although, unlike their Hispanic counterparts, they were never mounted on horseback.

There is little doubt that ACD had an encyclopaedic intellect with memory to match, as was often the case in the XIX century, when being 'well read' meant so much more than nowadays, because the computer can do it all for you.

Furthermore, from ACD's medical background, and the impression made on him by his medical professors, q.v Dr. Joseph Bell, one senses they are ever-present. To have made Dr. W. too ingenious, would have perhaps over-shadowed SH, reducing him, occasionally, to playing second fiddle - perish the thought !

As to Dr. W.'s qualifications, although written about at the time, the modernisation of the healing sciences were still in their infancy; cf. anaesthesia (general & local), infection control, medications, etc. There is little specification as to when, and under what circumstances he practised. Having been in the Afghan wars, much of this must have been basic and primitive battlefield medicine/surgery. There is no mention of the Crimean War 1854-56 or the Indian Mutinies, and the South African War was still in the future (1899-1902), although ACD was at the latest.

His qualification as a physician would have made him Dr., presumably he did specialise further as a surgeon, and once again become Mr., a point of honour in modern times, although for the benefit of his readership ACD left the honourific Dr. in his texts.

Be all that as it may, without Dr. Watson SH would probably not have become all that he became. I don't recall anyone suggesting that he should be done away with, or a replacement found.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Please raise your glasses to Dr. Watson!

10. Wartime Advances in Surgical Techniques

In connection with Chris's toast, Paul Billette enlightened us as to how the skills of the British army surgeon were most certainly advanced significantly on the battlefield during the conflict of the Crimean War of 1854-56. It was then that a lot of the surgical methods later employed in hospitals were first developed. With Florence Nightengale, surgeons learned how to keep wounds clean, prevent infections, and guard against the spread of disease, keeping the men alive. Chris concurred, adding that before Lister, surgeons went into operations in their street clothes, wearing aprons that had, dare we say it, not even been washed of their spatters from the previous surgeries.

11. From Russia with Love, and James Bond's Secret

The gold sovereign being passed around the table having now reached Wilfrid de Freitas, he recalled from when he was in the gold business how there is almost 1/4 ounce of gold in a sovereign, so one can calculate from this, by considering whatever the current price of gold happens to be, its value; for example, $\$1,100/4 = \275 in today's money.

In the James Bond story, *From Russia with Love*, secretly sewn into the lining of Bond's briefcase were 50 gold sovereigns to be used for any emergency. Back in the 1950s when the story was written, this was a considerable sum for getting yourself out of jams with.

12. Arthur and George

Paul and Wilfrid in turn highly recommend the three part TV series *Arthur and George*, based on the 2005 novel of the same name by Julian Barnes. Martin Clunes of *Doc Martin* fame plays Conan Doyle, made up to look exactly like him, and Arsher Ali plays George Edalji. Here we see unfold the fictionalized dramatization of one of the most famous cases Conan Doyle solved in real life. We also see portrayed here much of ACD's personal life, which is of great interest. The 3 episode series premiered last March 2015 on ITV in Britain.

13. Home, Sweet Victorian Home: Addressing the Challenges of Our Society's Future.

First the facts: The city of Westmount is interested in growing the membership of the Westmount Public Library. It wants to ensure that the needs and interests of Westmounters and members of the Library have priority when it comes to rooms and services at the library. In this regard Westmount has proposed that any group or society that wants to use the library rooms as a meeting venue have 50% of its members as residents of Westmount or be members of the library.

According to Paul Billette's figures, at present of the 20 paid up Bimetallic Question members, 9 are Westmounters. Non-Westmounters can pay \$55 per year to join the library if you are over 55 years old. If you are under 55 you could pay \$135 to join. Paul will be meeting with Westmount city councilor Nicole Forbes, who is a member of the library steering committee, and try to find a good solution with her whereby we can keep our favourite, and much appreciated, Victorian meeting place.

A positive aspect of the situation is that Paul Billette is now also in contact with Ellen Clavier of the Montreal Dickens Fellowship which also has meetings at the Westmount Public Library. They are in the same boat as us: What to do if they do not have the correct numbers of Westmounters or library members?

Paul and Ellie have had talks about our groups holding joint meetings and events, like a visit to the Chateau Ramezay Museum where Montreal's Dickens archives are housed. It was also suggested to have Mr. Clifford Goldfarb, a Dickens scholar and a member of the Bootmakers of Toronto, to come and give a talk at a regular meeting of the Bimetallic Question, to which we could invite Dickens Fellowship members. Paul will investigate further this event.

The Montreal Dickens Fellowship has a Victorian Ball in costume at Victoria Hall in Westmount in December. There are those in our Society who might like to attend. Details to follow.

14. Toast to Mrs. Hudson by Miyako Matsuda-Pelletier

New member Miyako Matsuda-Pelletier offered up her first Society toast, to Mrs. Hudson.



Mrs. Hudson, Sherlock Holmes, and Dr. Watson, as portrayed by Hayao Miyazaki

Everyone knows, and thinks they understand who Mrs. Hudson is, right? She's the landlady of Holmes and Watson who rent her rooms, and she cooks meals, and offers tea and coffee. In British TV series and movies, she was portrayed as an old lady with white hair and a bit plump and overweight.

Well, some Holmes fans argue that she's never described in the writings or novels. We really don't know HOW she actually looked. Was she really an old lady? And then, there is a Japanese TV animation, *Mei Tantei Holmes* (famous detective). It was shown from November 1984 to May 1985 originally, and created by Mr. Hayao Miyazaki (who received the best animated feature Academy

Award in 2003 for *Spirited Away*). In Mr. Miyazaki's version, Mrs. Hudson was portrayed as "a beauty": Young, 19 years old, good-looking, elegant, talks softly...almost an ideal Victorian "Lady" and domestic goddess. Why is that? I wondered. Because I think Mr. Miyazaki (who's also a big fan of "Holmes" I hear) thought she's not that old.

When Holmes and Watson came to her house to live as tenants, they were probably in their 20s . And Mrs. Hudson was a widow but people married when they were young in the past and she probably wasn't much older than them. (Or even younger? like in this animation? A 19 year-old could be a widow in Victorian England, due to illness and so on.) Also in this version, she enjoys the adventure of participating in her tenants' exploits, and even further, Holmes is in love with her. In the original Canon, she was never a love interest...but Watson says she was fond of him.

We feel that there is a real affection between Holmes and Mrs. Hudson - the fact that Holmes never moved out. (He could have bought a house instead of paying the rent for over 20 years!) It was a great friendship and affection for both of them in this particular situation - since he was a single, he needed to have someone helping out for meals and housekeeping. Anyway, how Mrs. Hudson looked isn't really important, I guess.

So let us toast, to Mrs. Hudson!

15. Looking Forward to Our Next Sherlock Holmes's Birthday Dinner

This year's birthday dinner will take place on Saturday, January 16, 2016 at the Atwater Club with a price of \$50 per person.

Chris Herten-Greaven will ask Kathy Reich if she would like to attend as our guest and be our speaker for the event. If she declines, Wilfrid de Freitas will inquire if Gazette film critic, Bill Brownstein would care to be our guest speaker.

Final details on the menu and speaker should be available at our December meeting. Thank you Paul, Chris and Wilfrid for all your effort.

16. When Holmes Meets Aislin

Karl J. Raudsepp has confirmed that Montreal Gazette editorial page cartoonist Aislin is working on the Sherlock Holmes cartoon for our Society and it will be ready soon, perhaps in time for our next Birthday dinner.

17. Toast to the Woman - Irene Adler by Kristin Franseen

Sherlockians have spent a lot of time putting forward historical figures who may have served as the model for Irene Adler, most famously Lola Montez and Lillie Langtry (also known as the "Jersey Lily"). In the course of preparing for my comprehensive exams in musicology last spring, however, I came across another figure in British musical and social life whose personal, highly public scandal may have inspired Arthur Conan Doyle. As far as I've been able to find, she has not previously been put forward as a candidate.

Caroline Norton (1808-1877), a respected novelist, reformer, and songwriter, alleviated the monetary pressures following a separation from her alcoholic, abusive husband (a barrister and politician who highly exaggerated his wealth prior to their marriage) by writing and composing professionally. The lawsuit over the income she made from her music and novels formed one of the first legal precedents for British divorce law and married women's property rights. Doyle, who was an advocate of divorce

law reform (something that also came up in tonight's story) no doubt had heard of her case. Her fame as a society hostess and accomplishments in the arts also might well have made her "the daintiest thing under a bonnet."

Of course, there is nothing in the Canon to suggest that Irene Adler's husband Godfrey Norton was abusive or ever tried to use his wife's celebrity for political gain as George Chapple Norton did. Nevertheless, that hasn't stopped many Sherlockians from speculating on the happiness of the Nortons' married life--perhaps most infamously William S. Baring-Gould, who puts forth the idea that Godfrey Norton was an alcoholic and that the couple separated shortly after their wedding (perhaps to justify his depiction of Adler and Holmes having a fling during the Great Hiatus).

In any case, whether or not the similarities between Caroline Sheridan Norton and Irene Adler Norton are significant, we might want to briefly remember a woman who had such influence on an issue dear to Doyle's heart and who could possibly have inspired the Woman.

To the Woman!

(Note: I first learned of Caroline Norton in a chapter entitled "Musical Women in England, 1860-1900," from Phyllis Weliver's *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science, and Gender in the Leisured Home*.)

18. Quiz on the Adventure of the Devil's Foot by Raf Jans.

The results: 1st Carol Abramson 44
 2nd Kristin Franseen 36
 3rd Wilfrid de Freitas 33

All three prizes were books on Queen Victoria.

Our thoughts on the quiz story:

The ensuing conversation on the *Adventure of the Devil's Foot* elicited comments on the many strange names, of Cornish and Welsh origin, in the story. In this regard Chris offered how he believes the Cornish language is very similar to the Welsh. It was also remarked how Celtic and other cultures further afield share aspects of cuisine, and indeed, the bagpipes.

Karl J. Raudsepp reflected how Holmes and Watson must have enjoyed a spectacular view off the headlands while in Cornwall, as St. Michael's Mount is located there. All in all, we were captivated by Cornwall.

Kristin Franseen found, as did Watson, that it was most unusual for Holmes to encourage Watson to publish an account of one of their adventures.

Bruno and Raf enjoyed Holmes's self-deprecation regarding their experiments with the Devil's Foot powder.

As is stressed in this and many of the stories, Holmes is concerned much more with justice than he is with the law. Kristin observed that over and over Conan Doyle portrays these sort of "honourable criminals", illustrating there is "honour outside the law".

Kristin reminds us how the story also features Conan Doyle's social commentary on "the deplorable laws of England" regarding divorce. Paul adds how ACD, who was passionate about social justice, wrote a monograph on divorce in 1910.

We find it understandable that it has been recorded that this was one of Conan Doyle's favourite stories.

In this regard Wilfrid told how back in 1927 the *Strand* magazine ran a competition where readers were invited to write in indicating their most favourite 12 Sherlock Holmes stories. These were matched up with Conan Doyle's choice of favourite 12 stories, 101 names were drawn, and the first person whose list matched up most closely with Conan Doyle's got 100 £, and a signed copy of the *Memories and Adventures* (but of the second edition, not the first !) Wilfrid found one the other day, which is known by collectors as "the prize edition", and it's certainly nice for anyone to have one of these 101 contest copies of Conan Doyle's biography signed by him.

19. Toast to the Society by Maureen Anderson, read by Ronnie Zilman

Many people will walk in and out of our society, some becoming lifetime members leaving footprints on our hearts, adding inspiration to our thoughts, while others will be a brief encounter, a new adventure, or perhaps just a notation in our minutes.

The Bimetallic members of yesterday are our history, new members who cross the library threshold today are but a future mystery. Each member may be responsible for a new adventure, as the thrill of Sherlock Holmes lives on for us, and for our society.

All are welcome, and those who venture to explore, will partake in an adventure of great minds, one of which, I simply adore!

A collection of the most interesting and adventurous irregulars I have ever had the pleasure of joining!

To The Society!!

20. Close of the Meeting

The meeting was adjourned by our Sovereign at 9:00pm.

21. Letter to the Editor

Dear David,

In Baker Street we follow the activities of the Sherlockian societies (when time and opportunity permits) and do so with great interest and gratitude. It is good to see the work of my "famous lodgers" as they are often referred to, recognized and carried on in this way.

I noted while reading your August Bimetallic Question minutes that you expressed an interest in whether or not Holmes and Watson would partake of fish and chips, one of your own favourite dishes, from the sound of it. As did your previous correspondent, the young gentleman Mr. Olaf, may I refer you to a cinematic film in my response?

You may recall in the opening of *Pursuit to Algiers* (1945), starring Basil Rathbone as Mr. Holmes and Nigel Bruce as Dr. Watson, how two strangers accost them in the street and inveigle them to enter a nearby unpromising-looking establishment that they claim, "serves the best fish and chips in London". Watson blusters that he can't abide the dish, while Holmes eagerly takes up the suggestion and orders fish and chips for them both.

So art accurately mirrored life in this instance, for Mr. Holmes truly enjoys a good helping of fish and chips now and then, while Dr. Watson has always had little enthusiasm for the dish as far as I know. This may simply be because, being a medical man, he has a bias towards what he considers healthier fare, along with, as you know, an abiding concern for his friend's health.

But as my own dear mother used to tell us whenever anyone was feeling guilty about partaking of a favourite food, "A little of what you fancy does you good." That's how I see it too.

By the way, in *Pursuit to Algiers*, the strangers turned out to be agents of a foreign power, and Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson didn't get a chance to eat their meal. They soon had, one could say, other fish to fry.

Wishing you and your society many safe and good adventures!

I am yours sincerely,

Martha Hudson, London

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, December 3rd, 2015, at 6:30p.m.

If you detect any errors or omissions in these minutes please do not hesitate to contact our recording secretary David Dowse at daviddowse@hotmail.com .

A tip of the deerstalker hat to our sergeant-at-arms Hudson, Raf Jans, for printing and mailing Society minutes to all members requesting the paper version.

