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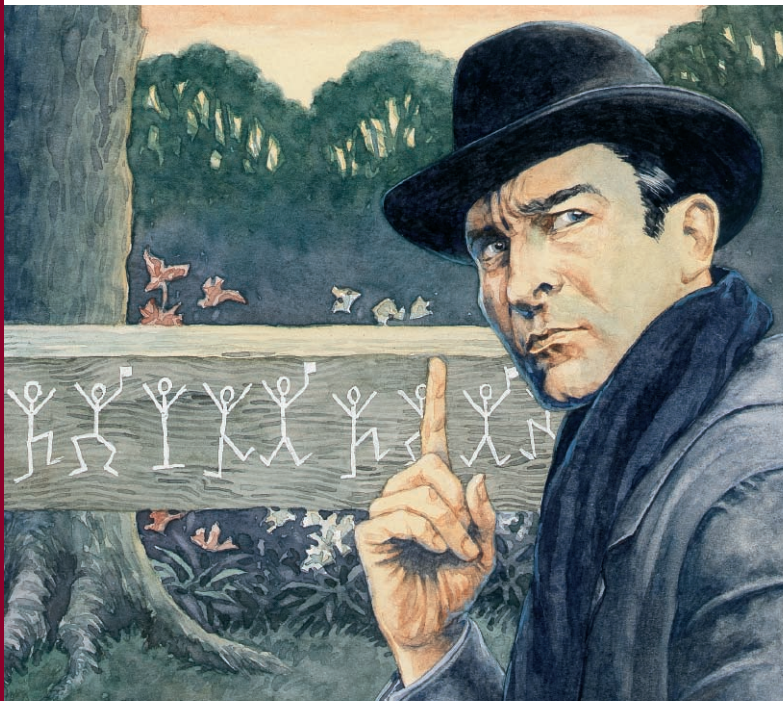
NA332412D

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

# The Return of Sherlock Holmes II

The Adventure of the Dancing Men and other stories

Read by **David Timson**



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<b>1</b>	<b>The Adventure of the Dancing Men</b>	4:10
<b>2</b>	A heavy step was heard upon the stairs	3:54
<b>3</b>	Well, we have been married now for a year	4:51
<b>4</b>	The interview left Sherlock Holmes very thoughtful	4:34
<b>5</b>	Suddenly, as she spoke	6:11
<b>6</b>	So indeed, it proved	4:43
<b>7</b>	Inspector Martin had the good sense to allow my friend	4:13
<b>8</b>	The study proved to be a small chamber	4:50
<b>9</b>	A flower-bed extended up to the study window	4:11
<b>10</b>	I think that I can help you to pass an hour	4:33
<b>11</b>	Even now I was in considerable difficulty	4:02
<b>12</b>	It is a privilege to be associated with you in the handling of a case	4:43
<b>13</b>	If Elsie dies, I care for nothing what becomes of me	4:27
<b>14</b>	A cab had driven up whilst the American had been talking	2:24

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15	<b>The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist</b>	4:01
16	My friend took the lady's ungloved hand	4:23
17	The first flaw in my happiness	4:00
18	Holmes chuckled and rubbed his hands.	4:19
19	We had ascertained from the lady	4:20
20	Mr Sherlock Holmes listened with attention	3:49
21	I found that country pub	4:45
22	A rainy night had been followed by a glorious morning,	4:31
23	It was a young fellow about seventeen	4:34
24	The strong, masterful personality of Holmes	4:03
25	Your reverence need not be excited	6:26

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<b>26</b>	<b>The Adventure of the Priory School</b>	3:53
27	Holmes shot out his long, thin arm	4:18
28	His absence was discovered at seven o'clock	4:22
29	Well, now, you do not mean to seriously suggest	3:29
30	That evening found us in the cold	4:35
31	One more question, your Grace	4:16
32	There is an inn here, the Red Bull	4:03
33	The day was just breaking	4:53
34	We continued our systematic survey	4:17
35	Now Watson, said he	3:41
36	As we approached the forbidding and squalid inn	3:20
37	When we were left alone in the stone-flagged kitchen	4:46
38	We did not go very far along the road	4:35
30	At eleven o'clock next morning	4:10
40	His Grace sat very stern and upright in his chair	4:00
41	I appreciate your conduct in coming here	4:00
42	The fellow was a rascal from the beginning	4:50
43	In the first place, your Grace	5:13

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<b>44</b>	<b>The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton</b>	<b>4:18</b>
45	I had seldom heard my friend speak with such intensity of feeling	4:00
46	Milverton chuckled	2:56
47	Now, you remember the sudden end of the engagement	3:50
48	For some days Holmes came and went at all hours	3:09
49	Exactly	3:43
50	It's a business that needs delicate treatment	4:17
51	No sound came from within	4:15
52	It was evident that we had entirely miscalculated his movements	4:14
53	The woman, without a word, had raised her veil	5:30
54	We had breakfasted and were smoking our morning pipe	4:52

**Total time:53:28**

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

# The Return of Sherlock Holmes II

In 1903, a nervous Conan Doyle wrote to his mother: 'Will they take to Holmes?'

A stupendous financial offer from the American magazine *Collier's Weekly* had finally forced the reluctant creator of the greatest fictional detective ever known to pick up his pen once more and re-enter the world of 221B Baker Street.

But it had been ten years since Doyle had written the short stories in which Holmes had first appeared and he was apprehensive: 'I am not conscious of any failing powers, and my work is not less conscientious than of old...The writing is easy. It is the plots which butcher me...' he wrote to his mother. He need not have feared. After a gap of ten years, only tantalisingly bridged by *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the public was feverish in its anticipation of the 'return' of their hero. When the series began in *The Strand* in 1903, one lady at the time wrote: 'The scenes at the railway bookstalls were worse than anything I ever saw at a bargain sale...' The queues outside the magazine's offices stretched the length of Southampton

Street. In America, handbills announced ecstatically: 'Sherlock Holmes Returns!!' *The Strand* showed typical English reserve: 'The news of his death was received with regret as at the loss of a personal friend. Fortunately the news...turns out to be erroneous.'

## THE ADVENTURE OF THE DANCING MEN

It seems that Conan Doyle came upon the idea for *The Dancing Men* whilst visiting Norfolk in 1903. Doyle had just begun writing the stories for *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* and was consulting his brother-in-law, a celebrated author in his own right, E.W. Hornung (the creator of 'Raffles' – see also notes for *Charles Augustus Milverton*). Hornung lived near Cromer, and Doyle stayed at the Hill House Hotel in Happisburgh. The hotel today has been reduced to the level of a pub, but has not ignored the Holmes connection; press cuttings and a photograph of the Sherlock Holmes Society valiantly recreating the antics of the 'dancing men' adorn its walls. The landlord at the hotel in Doyle's day was called Cubitt, which name he borrowed for

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one of the central characters, the Norfolk squire, Hilton Cubitt. Also, in an autograph book belonging to the landlord's seven-year-old son, Doyle apparently found the hieroglyph of the dancing men.

So Doyle did not invent this cipher? It seems only too probable that he copied it from Cubitt Junior, who may have been familiar with the cipher, as it appeared in *The Boys Own Paper* in 1881. It is interesting too to note that Doyle had contributed a story to this magazine in 1887.

The cipher used however, is similar to that employed by Edgar Alan Poe in *The Gold Bug*. For the mathematical, it has been noted that with the various possible positions for the arms and legs of the 'dancing men', 784 different symbols can be produced; and if they are inverted (as some of them are in the examples given in the text) 1,568 symbols are a possibility. It would have been an intriguing exercise for a boy (or celebrated author) on a wet afternoon in Norfolk to investigate.

It should be noted that Holmes appears to be grossly negligent in not seeing the mortal danger his client was in. He delays for two days after having deciphered the code, before journeying to Norfolk! Sometimes it appears that Holmes' desire to assemble all the facts of a case, to 'tidy it

up', before divulging his theory conflicts with the necessity at times to be practical and avoid a tragedy. Is Doyle at pains to show us perhaps that in returning his creation to life, he is not as flawless in his judgements as his fans would like to believe?

Norfolk proved to be an artistically stimulating county for Conan Doyle, for it was during a golfing holiday in Cromer, that his companion Robinson first came up with the idea for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Inserted into the text of this story are the pictorial representations of the 'dancing men' as communicated to Mr Hilton Cubitt's wife. The line from the text which precedes each drawing is given below:

'The markings were done in pencil....'

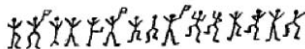


Fig. 1

'He unfolded a paper and laid it upon the table. [Here is a copy of the hieroglyphics:]'

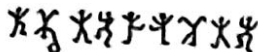


Fig. 2

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'...two mornings later a fresh inscription had appeared. I have a copy of it here:

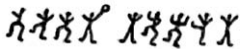


Fig. 3

'Again he produced a paper. [The new dance was in this form]'

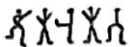


Fig. 4

'...a long inscription had appeared that morning upon the pedestal of the sun-dial. He enclosed a copy of it:'

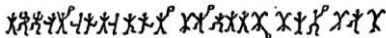


Fig. 5

*Individual letters:*

'This symbol...stood for E'



Fig. 6

'...these symbols...stand respectively for N, V, and R.'

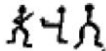


Fig. 7

'See if you can read it Watson,' said he, with a smile. It contained no word, but a little line of dancing men:'



Fig. 8

## THE ADVENTURE OF THE SOLITARY CYCLIST

Although these stories were written in 1903, on the threshold of a new century, Conan Doyle chose deliberately to write of past crimes solved by the investigative duo. Watson in the opening of this story defines the period more precisely as 'the years 1894 to 1901 inclusive'. Thus Conan Doyle places his characters forever in aspic; the world of the nineteenth century: gaslight, Hansom cabs, steam trains, London fogs and the policeman on the beat, whose lot, according to Gilbert and Sullivan, 'was not a happy one'. Electric lights, motor cars, aeroplanes and an efficient police force belonged to the twentieth century, and the



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fictional detectives who would follow in their hundreds in the wake of Sherlock Holmes.

The bicycle was a boon to young women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Apart from the obvious advantages for courtship (remember Daisy, 'on a bicycle made for two', – a song published coincidentally in 1895, the year of this case), it gave women the opportunity to be independent and go where they liked, when they chose. They earned themselves the title of 'flying females'. To emphasise this symbol of feminism, women were encouraged to wear 'rational dress': a decidedly masculine style of jacket with – horror of horrors! – trousers or knickerbockers for ease in pedalling. It is not recorded whether Miss Violet Smith dressed in this conspicuous way when cycling; probably not, though as the daughter of an entertainer (her father was the conductor at the old Imperial Theatre), she may have been 'bohemian' enough to dress the part and be 'modern'.

1895 was also the year of the first safety bicycle with Dr Dunlop's newfangled pneumatic tyres; though 'Raleigh' were the leading manufacturers of bicycles at this date.

Violet seems to be a name that Conan Doyle associates with girls who are self-

reliant and enterprising; Miss Smith is remarkably similar to the governess Miss Violet Hunter in *The Copper Beeches*. It would not be at all surprising to learn that she, too, possessed a bicycle.

## **THE ADVENTURE OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL**

If Sherlock Holmes' financial future was not secure by 1901, the year of this case, it certainly was by the conclusion of the adventure. The Duke of Holderness had offered as a reward, for information about his missing son, what was then a colossal sum – £6,000. Such a figure would give considerable security to the freelance detective and his full-time assistant (for Watson had given up his practice at the beginning of this collection of cases). Some Sherlockians are disappointed that their hero does not live up to his own dictates: 'As to reward, my profession is its reward', and therefore refuse to accept anything so sordid as payment for solving the case. But Holmes was a practical man, and with a healthy disdain in his voice for the privileged in Victorian society, he accepts the Duke's cheque without a qualm, much to the Duke's disgust.

It may be that Holmes is being ironic when he states: 'I am a poor man', whilst

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pocketing the cheque; yet equally he may have been concerned that in 1901, the year of this case, income tax had risen to one shilling and tuppence in the pound (approx. six new pence today.)

We should recall that only when he was approached by clients who were struggling financially did he waive his fee. Miss Morstan, the future wife of Dr Watson, in the *Sign of Four* is one such; the unfortunate Hatherley in *The Engineer's Thumb*, another.

Once again in this story, Conan Doyle pays tribute to the practicalities of that wondrous machine, the bicycle (see *Solitary Cyclist* above). Conan Doyle was a very athletic man and would have enjoyed riding a bicycle, and its variations; for there is a photograph of him and his first wife, Louise, outside their South Norwood home, looking most uncomfortable on a large and unwieldy two-seater tricycle. However, his enthusiasm for cycling got the better of him in this story. When Holmes determines the direction a rider has gone by the tracks left by his tyres, many readers questioned the possibility of this. 'I had so many remonstrances upon this point,' he wrote, 'varying from pity to anger, that I took out my bicycle and tried.' He had to admit that his readers were right.

Holmes is well out of his familiar territory in this case – the North of England – though more correctly the Midlands, as the setting is the Peak District of Derbyshire. It is clear that 'Mackleton' is really Matlock, some ten miles from Chesterfield.

Watson may be showing once again a tendency towards discretion when writing about the aristocracy's affairs, as the Duke of Holderness may well be a pseudonym for the 8th Duke of Devonshire, whose ancestral estates were, like the fictional Duke's, in the Peak District, most notably Chatsworth.

## **THE ADVENTURE OF CHARLES AUGUSTUS MILVERTON**

In this case we get a glimpse of the downside of upper class life; the potential vulnerability for blackmail. Holmes must have had a reputation amongst the aristocracy for specialising in this type of case, and indeed he had an excellent track record. He had assisted the King of Bohemia in retrieving compromising photographs. He had had successful dealings, too, with the royal families of Scandinavia and Holland by 1882, the date of this case, which though unrecorded by Watson, may well have involved blackmail. Despite exhibiting a healthy disdain for those who are wealthy

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and privileged by birth, Holmes' innate sense of fair play comes to the fore when confronted with a parasite like Milverton, whom he unequivocally calls, 'as cunning as the Evil One'.

Watson records that 'his skin went cold', when Holmes revealed he intended to burgle Milverton's house, and the gravity of Holmes and Watson's 'breaking and entering' should not be underestimated. At this time housebreaking carried a maximum sentence of fourteen years. By the end of their eventful evening they had committed malicious damage (the burning of the letters from Milverton's safe) and assault (Watson kicking himself free of the undergardener). Not to mention the emotional damage Holmes had previously perpetrated on Milverton's housemaid by proposing to her whilst in disguise. No risk seems too great, it would seem, to preserve the reputations of the aristocracy!

Holmes and Watson are in evening dress when they attempt the burglary, which cannot fail to remind the connoisseur of detective fiction of one of the other popular fictional creations of the Victorian era, A.J. Raffles – 'the Gentleman Thief' – Raffles is a mixture of gentleman and criminal, possessing a cool nerve which reminds us of Holmes. He was created in 1899 by

E.W. Hornung who was, coincidentally, Conan Doyle's brother-in-law.

Why is Watson so reticent to reveal the facts of this case? It is with 'diffidence I allude to them' he writes in the opening sentence; he approaches his task with 'discretion and reticence' and despite the 'principal person' being beyond 'the reach of human law', aspects of the case still require 'suppression'. So, who is the 'principal person' and why all the secrecy?

There were any number of high society scandals during the 1880s and 90s that might have inspired this story, at least one involving that 'principal person' Edward, the Prince of Wales.

It is well known that Edward had an eye for the ladies and in the late 1880s began a secret liaison with Daisy, the Countess of Warwick. She was a society beauty – 'the photographers are pursuing her' wrote the papers, when she was only 17. She married Lord Brooke in 1880, but had a succession of aristocratic lovers before her association with the Prince of Wales. Lord Charles Beresford was one such, to whom she penned a passionate and jealous letter when she discovered Beresford's wife was pregnant. The letter was intercepted by Lady Charles and sent to her solicitor. Daisy appealed to the Prince of Wales for his assistance in





Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

# The Return of Sherlock Holmes II

The Adventure of the Dancing Men • The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist  
The Adventure of the Priory School • The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton

Read by **David Timson**

No case is too slight for the mental powers of the Great Detective, in this second selection from **The Return of Sherlock Holmes**. A young girl is stalked by a 'solitary cyclist' whilst the 'dancing men' hieroglyphics found in Norfolk lead to a sinister connection with America. Holmes enters the murky world of high society blackmail in 'Charles Augustus Milverton'; and finds an abducted student from the 'Priory School.' As always, his friend Dr. Watson is with him to assist and chronicle these cases.



**David Timson** has made over 1,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio Drama. Audiobooks include *Barchester Towers* for Penguin and *Poirot* stories for Agatha Christie Ltd. For Naxos AudioBooks he wrote *The History of the Theatre*, which won an award for most original production from the Spoken Word Publishers Association in 2001. He has also directed for Naxos four plays of Shakespeare, including *Richard III* (with Kenneth Branagh), which won Best Drama Award from the SWPA in 2001. In 2002 he won the Audio of the Year Award for his reading of *A Study in Scarlet*.

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