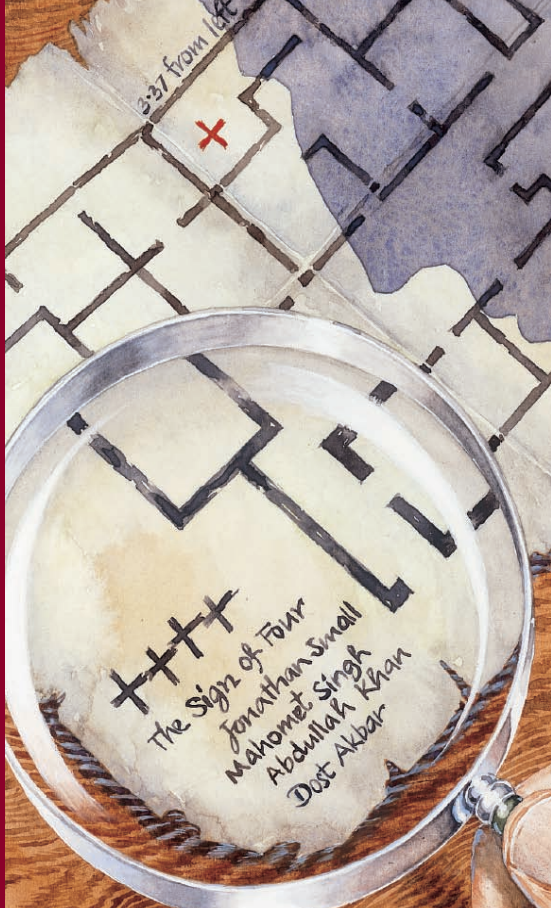


NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

UNABRIDGED



Sir Arthur
Conan Doyle

The Sign of Four

Read by
David Timson

NA429612D

| | | |
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| 1 | The Science of Deduction | 6:57 |
| 2 | “My practice has extended recently to the Continent” | 5:53 |
| 3 | ‘I handed him over the watch’ | 6:35 |
| 4 | The Statement of the Case | 9:42 |
| 5 | ‘Standing at the window, I watched her walking briskly down the street’ | 3:15 |
| 6 | In Quest of a Solution | 5:49 |
| 7 | ‘It was a September evening’ | 5:52 |
| 8 | The Story of the Bald Headed Man | 8:27 |
| 9 | “My father was, as you may have guessed” | 9:02 |
| 10 | ‘The little man stopped to relight his hookah’ | 7:38 |
| 11 | The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge | 8:01 |
| 12 | ‘At that moment the door of the house burst open’ | 4:39 |
| 13 | ‘It appeared to have been fitted up as a chemical laboratory’ | 4:14 |
| 14 | Sherlock Holmes Gives a Demonstration | 5:47 |
| 15 | ‘The chamber in which we found ourselves’ | 5:26 |
| 16 | ‘As he spoke, the steps which had been coming nearer sounded loudly on the passage’ | 9:02 |
| 17 | The Episode of the Barrel | 7:10 |
| 18 | ‘Toby proved to be an ugly, long-haired, lop-eared creature’ | 5:51 |

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| 19 | 'The east had been gradually whitening' | 9:58 |
| 20 | 'We had during this time been following the guidance of Toby' | 3:09 |
| 21 | The Baker Street Irregulars | 2:58 |
| 22 | 'He was approaching the door of the house' | 6:44 |
| 23 | 'It was between eight and nine o'clock now' | 5:58 |
| 24 | 'He handed them a shilling each' | 5:21 |
| 25 | A Break in the Chain | 7:02 |
| 26 | 'We did not, however.' | 3:47 |
| 27 | 'It was a long day.' | 4:43 |
| 28 | 'A heavy step was heard ascending the stair' | 3:09 |
| 29 | 'We both started in our chairs' | 3:42 |
| 30 | The End of the Islander | 9:04 |
| 31 | 'While this conversation had been proceeding' | 4:05 |
| 32 | 'At that moment, however, as our evil fate would have it' | 7:02 |
| 33 | The Great Agra Treasure | 7:40 |
| 34 | 'They landed me at Vauxhall' | 7:30 |
| 35 | The Strange Story of Jonathan Small | 6:34 |
| 36 | ""I am a Worcestershire man myself, born near Pershore."" | 7:04 |
| 37 | ""The City of Agra is a great place"" | 3:48 |

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| 38 | “The third night of my watch was dark and dirty” | 7:29 |
| 39 | “In Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and a sacred thing” | 6:56 |
| 40 | ‘He stopped and held out his manacled hands’ | 7:05 |
| 41 | “It was rather a queer position we found ourselves in then.” | 6:45 |
| 42 | “Two nights later he and his friend, Captain Morstan, came” | 4:42 |
| 43 | “Well, gentlemen, I weary you with my long story” | 4:42 |
| 44 | “Well, if I were to tell you all the adventures” | 5:07 |
| 45 | “A very remarkable account,” said Sherlock Holmes’ | 4:57 |

Total time: 4:36:48

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The Sign of Four

'It is always a joy to me to meet an American...' says Sherlock Holmes in **The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor**, and these feelings must have been most assuredly in the breast of Conan Doyle in August 1889, as he turned up at the Langham Hotel in central London, for a dinner with Mr. Joseph Marshall Stoddart from Philadelphia. Stoddart was the editor of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, and was seeking to commission new work from aspiring young English writers; he offered Doyle £100 for a short novel to be serialised in the magazine. These terms were considerably more advantageous than those he had agreed to for **A Study in Scarlet**, where he had signed away all his rights for a mere £25. The success of the first Holmes novel in America prompted Doyle to make the detective the subject for this new commission, for as he said, 'I notice that everyone who has read the book wants to know more of that young man', and more is what we discover in **The Sign of Four** as the new novel was titled (although in America it was published as **The Sign of the Four**).

Doyle is at pains to show us that his hero is not without certain flaws, flaunting convention and is generally a law unto himself; characteristics that were associated with another aspiring writer that Doyle met at the dinner at the Langham, Mr. Oscar Wilde. Two more dissimilar characters it is hard to imagine than Wilde and Doyle, yet the latter recalled that Wilde's conversation 'left an indelible impression upon my mind'. As he set about expanding the character of Holmes, maybe Oscar's conversation, languidness and louche Bohemianism suggested to Doyle some interesting dimensions to add to the personality of his burgeoning detective creation. The very opening of the novel, for instance, introduces us to Holmes' use of cocaine for stimulation; his arm is 'dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture marks', from its obviously regular use. Cocaine was readily available over the chemist's counter in Victorian Britain, when it was frequently used as a tonic for nerves, nevertheless Dr. Watson's admonition of Holmes indicates that doctors at least were well aware the drug was open to abuse and

could lead to addiction.

It is certain that the character of Thaddeus Sholto is a thinly-veiled caricature of Wilde, the figurehead of Aestheticism. He is prone to speak like Wilde: Sholto describes his 'sanctum' as 'An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London', and his mannerism wickedly apes Wilde's own: 'Nature had given him...a too visible line of yellow and irregular teeth, which he strove feebly to conceal by constantly passing his hand over the lower part of his face.' This was a well-known habit of Wilde's, developed after a mercury treatment for syphilis had turned his teeth black.

The first impression that Holmes had given Watson, and thereby the reader, in **A Study in Scarlet** was of a single-minded man devoted to the cause of scientific detection. Holmes said that 'he would acquire no knowledge which did not bear upon his object. Therefore all the knowledge which he possessed was such as would be useful to him.' Watson even went as far as making a memorandum of the pros and cons of his new friend's interests, which included: 'Knowledge of Literature – Nil... Knowledge of Philosophy – Nil... Knowledge of Sensational Literature – Immense'.

However, in **The Sign of Four**, Doyle seems eager to impress the reader with Holmes' wide-ranging knowledge of both literature and philosophy, thereby implying that first impressions should not be relied upon. Indeed, Holmes refers twice in passing to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), the German poet and playwright; and also to two philosophers, more obscure to a modern reader than they would have been in the nineteenth century: Winwood Reade (1838-75) was a traveller and novelist whose 'daring speculations' formulated within his book 'The Martyrdom of Man' (1872), shocked Victorian society with the notion that 'The soul must be sacrificed; the hope in immortality must die'. A book perhaps well suited to Holmes' neurotic temperament but hardly likely to appeal to the love-sick Watson! Holmes also quotes Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825), a German writer whose works were introduced into England by Thomas Carlyle. Among his 'Analects', there is one on 'The Grandeur of Man in His Littleness'. Indeed, Holmes carries a philosophical air about him throughout **The Sign of Four**. Earlier he had impressed Watson by talking 'on miracle plays, on medieval pottery, on Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of

Ceylon, and on the warships of the future – handling each as though he had made a special study of it'. Doyle did not want to leave his reader in any doubt about the eclectic and eccentric nature of his hero.

Watson's character too is broadened in this novel; he is given a love interest, which is prefaced by a reference to a romantic past: '...an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents.' Sadly, we never again get to hear of this fascinating aspect of Watson's life. The Doctor's inherent modesty no doubt forbids it, but it is obvious throughout the canon that he is always susceptible to a pretty face. Here he falls hopelessly for the 'sweet and amiable' Mary Morstan, and after much noble struggling over the differences in their financial positions, proposes and is accepted by her. Holmes characteristically receives the news with 'a dismal groan'. The completely opposite natures of Holmes and Watson, which leads to much friendly chaff and debate in the stories, and is one of the joys of reading them, are established here for the first time.

As for Watson's war wound, about which whole libraries of books have been written, it is perhaps best not to enquire too

deeply. In **A Study in Scarlet** it is clearly stated that he was hit in the shoulder during the Afghan campaign by a Jezail bullet, but in **The Sign of Four** he nurses his wounded leg. Was he shot twice? Or, as one ingenious medic proposed, did the bullet ricochet downwards describing a spiral curve deep under the skin of the chest and abdomen...coming to rest in the calf muscles? Or is it just another example of Doyle's carelessness through not correcting his manuscripts?

The Sign of Four was written within a month of its commission; Doyle did not wish to spend too much time away from the serious work he had in hand – his novel of knights and chivalry, **The White Company**. The recent success of his novel **Micah Clarke**, published in 1889, had persuaded him that this was where his true talents lay, in historical novels, which in his opinion gave an author a degree of 'literary dignity'. Nevertheless, Doyle produced a cracking yarn crowded with incident; the pace and excitement he maintains in the river chase, for instance, is worthy of a modern action film. The American public was delighted with this new story when it duly appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890. Once again, as in

A Study in Scarlet, Doyle draws upon his substantial knowledge of history to provide a convincing backdrop for his story, in this case the Indian Mutiny of 1857. That event, still recent history for Doyle's readers in 1890, provided a sinister oriental air to this tale of stolen treasure, clashing cultures and broken oaths. In **The Adventure of the Crooked Man**, Col. Barclay's regiment too had fought in the Mutiny. However, if Doyle is historically accurate, he is geographically uncertain. To enhance still further the exotic atmosphere of his story, Doyle created Tonga, the native of the Andaman Islands, but he is anthropologically inaccurate in portraying these natives as vicious and cannibalistic, when they were in fact anything but. When the Islanders heard how they were portrayed in **The Sign of Four** they were appalled.

The adventure begins properly when Holmes, Watson and Miss Morstan keep an assignation with Thaddeus Sholto's servant at 'the third pillar from the left outside the Lyceum Theatre', and it may be of interest in passing, to recall Doyle's involvement with that establishment. From 1878, the Lyceum was the Victorian equivalent of a National Theatre, presided over for more than 25 years by that theatrical legend, Sir Henry Irving. Doyle had admired Irving

for years, and in 1894 offered him a one-act play entitled **A Story of Waterloo** – a slight story about a veteran of the great battle. Irving knew a good part when he saw it, and despite George Bernard Shaw, a perennial thorn in Irving's flesh, who reviewed it scathingly ('he depicts with convincing art the state of an old man's joints'), the piece was played as a curtain-raiser over 300 times. Every time it was played Doyle received a royalty of one guinea. It was at the Lyceum too, in 1901, that William Gillette, an American actor, brought his play, simply entitled 'Sherlock Holmes'. It had been playing throughout the United States with considerable success. Earlier, Doyle had seen the theatrical potential of Holmes for himself and had written a five-act play based on the sleuth's early career. The American impresario Charles Frohman read it but did not think it performable. With a substantial rewrite by Gillette, who was shrewd enough to acknowledge Doyle as a co-author, the play was a massive success on both sides of the Atlantic. Gillette, who played Holmes, made the part his own and is responsible for many of the images we associate with the detective. He played the part wearing a deerstalker and smoked a curved Meerschaum pipe because it was easier to

keep in the mouth whilst speaking lines. There is even a line in the play that was, with a little adaptation, to become legendary: 'Oh, this is elementary, my dear Watson.' It never appears in Doyle's stories. Indeed, Gillette appears to have taken considerable liberties with the character of Holmes with the author's blessing. By the late 1890s, Doyle was going through a periodic loss of interest in his creation, to the point that when Gillette, in the midst of writing the play, wired him enthusiastically asking: 'May I marry Holmes?' Doyle replied tetchily: 'You may marry him, or murder him, or do what you like with him.'

TRANSLATIONS OF HOLMES' FOREIGN PHRASES

To show that Holmes is considerably more erudite than he may have at first appeared in **A Study in Scarlet**, Doyle peppers Holmes' conversation in **The Sign of Four** with apposite foreign phrases and quotes from Goethe. The listener may find the following translations useful:

'Le mauvais goût, mené au crime.'
(*Stendhal*)

– Bad taste leads to crime.

'Il n'y a pas des sots si incommodes, que ceux qui ont de l'esprit!' (*Rochefoucauld*)

– There are no fools so troublesome as those that have some wit.

'Wir sind gewohnt dass die Menschen verhöhnen was sie nicht verstehen' (*Goethe*)

– We are used to see that Man despises what he never comprehends.

'Schade, dass die Natur nur einen Mensch aus dir schuf, denn zum würdigen Mann war und zum Schelmen der Stoff.'
(*Goethe*)

– Nature, alas, made only one being out of you although there was material for a good man and a rogue.

Notes by David Timson

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and MARCO POLO music catalogues**

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| PAGANINI 24 CAPRICES, OP. 1 Ilya Kaler, Violin | 8.550717 |

Music programmed by Sarah Butcher

Cover picture: Hemesh Alles

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The Sign of Four

Read by **David Timson**

The Sign of Four is the second novel by Doyle about the exploits of Sherlock Holmes. From the moment that Mary Morstan tells Holmes about the mysterious disappearance of her father and the yearly gift of a pearl from an unknown benefactor, Holmes, and his companion Watson, are involved in an exotic tale of stolen treasure, secret oaths and murder, culminating in a breathtaking chase down the Thames. Holmes is in top form, and Watson falls in love.



David Timson has performed in modern and classic plays across the country and abroad, including *Wild Honey* for Alan Ayckbourn, *Hamlet*, *The Man of Mode* and *The Seagull*. He has been seen on TV in *Nelson's Column* and *Swallows and Amazons*, and in the film *The Russia House*. A familiar and versatile audio and radio voice, he reads *The Middle Way* and performs in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Naxos AudioBooks. He has read eight volumes of Sherlock Holmes stories for Naxos AudioBooks.

*"A thoroughly engrossing unabridged recording
by the excellent David Timson."*

THE DISTRICT MESSENGER, THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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