

My dear Dr Watson,

Further to our correspondence of the 15<sup>th</sup> ult...

No, scrub that. This is strictly unofficial and off the record, and if you so much as think of publishing any part of it I will have you, sunshine, good and proper.

Right. Where was I? Oh, yes...

I see that Mr Sherlock Holmes has decided to pack in the detective business and retire to the south coast. Very nice, too! I also am about to become a gentleman of leisure, having been detecting, I may say, for quite a few years more than Mr H, but I don't expect to be moving from my little house in Camberwell — not till they carry me out feet first, anyway.

Well, well! I can't say I begrudge Mr Holmes his retirement. Goodness knows he's earned it, and I'm not too proud to admit that he was a great help to me on many occasions, and to some of my colleagues as well. Toby Gregson — he hates being called that! — Tobias Gregson is probably indebted to Mr H for his promotion. Did you know that? At all events, he became an Inspector shortly after the successful conclusion of the Arnsworth Castle affair.

Come to think of it, I may even owe my rise in the force to Mr Holmes, though I like to think that my own good qualities had something to do with it. If I remember correctly, Mr H once said I was the best of the professionals, and I've always taken that as a high compliment, even if he did also call me "that imbecile Lestrade"!

Dear me, but we've seen some times, haven't we, Doctor — you, me and Mr Sherlock Holmes! "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow."

Hah! That surprised you, I'll bet: me quoting the Bard! The fact is that I once saw Beerbohm Tree play Falstaff, and I've never forgotten his performance. I couldn't tell you which play it was — "The Merry Wives of Whatsit" or "Henry Ivy" — but it was the best evening I ever had in the theatre, outside of the Drury Lane pantomimes, of course. (I say, can you imagine Herbert Campbell as the fat

knight and Dan Leno as Justice Shallow? That would be something, now, wouldn't it?)

We have seen some times, though, haven't we? That Norwood affair, the business out in Herefordshire, the Black Pearl of the Borgias... Great days, Doctor, great days! And, you know, I was right about that last case: the Mafia was involved, after all, even if its involvement did turn out to be a bit of a red herring.

Do you recall our first proper meeting? Well, of course you do; it was at an empty house in Lauriston Gardens, Brixton — empty, that is, apart from Toby Gregson and a very ugly corpse. Gregson was at his most pompous, I remember, and Mr Holmes was at his most superior. I don't need to tell you that he was always keen to prove himself a better detective than any of us, and in those early days I sometimes suspected that that outweighed his wish to see justice done. Later, of course, I discovered that I was mistaken, but it was a close-run thing on occasion.

That, as I say, was our first proper meeting, though we had seen each other a few times before then, without either of us knowing just who the other one was. I quickly realised that you were sharing digs with Mr H, and in time he told you that I was — let me see — “a well-known detective, who got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case”. Yes, well... it's true enough, as far as it goes, though the case was a good deal more complicated than Mr H would admit.

You weren't exactly complimentary about me yourself, were you? A “little sallow, rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow” you called me then, and not so long after, you said I was “lean and ferret-like”. Well, I suppose a ferret is a more useful creature than a rat! I rather like ferrets, as it happens. My old dad used to breed them — lithe, handsome things they were, very cat-like in their ways, wonderful for getting in and out of tight corners, absolutely fearless, and unbeatable for rabbiting. You know, I really don't mind being called ferret-like! A ferret's as good a model for a detective as any sort of dog.

Come to think of it, you've compared me to a dog on occasion as well. Not a hound — I think you kept that particular simile for Mr Sherlock Holmes — but a

“small wiry bulldog”. That made my wife sit up, I can tell you! She’s always the first to admit that yours truly is no oil painting, but even she couldn’t work out how the same person can resemble both a ferret and a bulldog!

Let’s see. That was the Dartmoor business, wasn’t it? Why I ever let Mr Holmes talk me into these things I shall never know. You wouldn’t believe the trouble I had with my own Superintendent and the Deputy C.C. of the Devonshire Constabulary! I’m sure it put my career back two years. Ah, well, it’s all water under the bridge, and I wouldn’t have missed it for the world, though I don’t know whether Sir Henry would agree. Still, he seems to be getting on all right these days, thank goodness.

What was that stuff about an unsigned warrant, though? “Coming down with unsigned warrant.” I can only imagine that you had lost the telegram I sent and wrote the first thing that came into your head. After all this time I can’t remember just what I did say, but I’m certain I never mentioned an unsigned warrant! What’s the use of a warrant if it isn’t signed?

And while I think of it, I’ve often wondered why you described me as little and small. I’m thin — always have been, eat like a horse and never put a pound on — and I’ll grant you that I’m shorter than Mr H. Well, most people are, aren’t they? He’s a fraction over six foot, I think, and, as you said yourself, he’s so very lean that he seems to be considerably taller. (It’s odd, but my leanness seems to have the opposite effect!) I’m shorter than you, if it comes to that, but only by half an inch. In fact I stand — or did, in my prime — exactly five foot ten, the absolute minimum height for an officer in the good old Metropolitan Police.

I hope you don’t mind me letting off a bit of steam. It’s not really anything personal, you know, only things are rather slow here at the moment. If I weren’t writing to you I’d just be tidying up my desk and clearing out my cupboard, getting ready to leave the Yard.

I’ll miss the old place, of course I will. Old, did I say? This is New Scotland Yard, mate, and they don’t let you forget it, especially if you’ve been around as long as I have, and remember working at Great Scotland Yard, the other end of Whitehall! Well, you’ll remember what that was like. We occupied half a dozen

buildings around Whitehall Place and Great Scotland Yard. It was dark, poky and uncomfortable. This place is like the Langham Hotel by comparison, but that's not why I'll miss it.

It's the people, the fact that every day is different, the knowledge that you're helping to keep London safe... but there's more to it than that. We work hard here, you know (and it is mostly brainwork, whatever Mr Holmes may say to the contrary). Sometimes it can be dull, but most of the time — well, you've written about the “adventures” of Sherlock Holmes; I can assure you that the adventures of G. Lestrade have been no less exciting!

Still, I can't deny that the best of them have been the ones I shared with you and Mr Holmes. The Baskerville case really was a corker, and it would have been hard to top that business of the stolen submarine plans. Police work isn't always appreciated, despite what you may read in the papers, so it's nice to get a bit of public recognition — ah! I know what you're thinking, but you're wrong. True, there was no public recognition in that case: you said yourself that it was part of “that secret history of a nation which is often so much more intimate and interesting than its public chronicles”. But we all knew, didn't we, that we'd done the country good service, and that we had the approval of the people who matter.

If anyone should ask me, though, what was the most memorable adventure in my forty years with the force, I'd have to say the arrest of Sebastian Moran. Not just because it cleared up a particularly baffling murder case; not even because it put an end to the Moriarty gang at last; but because it rather gloriously confirmed my suspicions that Mr Sherlock Holmes was still alive and that he would eventually come back to London. You know, Doctor, I was never so glad in my life as when I got his message asking me to be in Baker Street that night!

And now, even though only one of us has reached what I'd call retirement age, we're both packing it in. Goodness knows what Mr Holmes will find to do down there in Sussex, but I intend to spend my time in the garden. Mrs L has made it very clear that she doesn't want me in the house all day, getting under her feet!

You've got yourself a good practice now, haven't you, just off Harley Street, and I can't somehow see you retiring for a good many years. Well, if anyone deserves success, Doctor, I reckon it's you. You've said a lot in your memoirs about the remarkable qualities of Mr Sherlock Holmes, and you've even come to appreciate that we in the C.I.D. aren't lacking in skill and intelligence! But you've rather tended to hide your own light under a bushel. On occasion you've made yourself out to be a bit of a booby, which is something you're definitely not!

Your military service may have been fairly short, but it was by no means ignominious. You're intelligent, skilful and courageous. Unlike Mr H, you have a gift for making friends — and you're a better shot than he is, for all his fancy pistol-work indoors. (My word, wasn't Mrs Hudson's face a picture when she saw what he'd done to the wall of your sitting-room!)

Above all, Doctor, you're honest and straightforward. It's been a pleasure and a privilege to know you. If I may adopt the language of the streets for a moment, and use a phrase that I'm sure Mr Holmes would recognise, you, Dr John H. Watson, are a Diamond Geezer!

Please give my best regards to Mrs Watson, and believe me to be,

Yours very sincerely,

*G. Lestrade*