

A toast to Dr. J.H. Watson

by Ross E. Davies

before a meeting of The Sons of the Copper Beeches at The Racquet Club of Philadelphia on April 15, 2016

With apologies to Rudyard Kipling, who wrote the poem “If—” in the perpetual year of 1895.¹

If you can keep your head when Mary Morstan
Is losing hers while in a cab with you,
If you can trust your judgment as her husband,
While facing Holmes’s dismal groaned adieu;²
If you can wait with a hunter’s thrill of waiting,
By the water-pool for a thirsty beast of prey,³
Or dash to danger of the Cunninghams’ own making,
To tear Holmes safely from the fray:⁴

If you can dream — and in a land of dreams break through despair;⁵
If you can think — and act — when dying Holmes’s salvation is your aim;⁶
If you can take a burglar’s bullet just off Edgware⁷
And treat a Ghazi’s Jezail just the same;⁸
If you can make one heap of half your pension
And risk it on one turn outside the paddock,⁹
And lose, and start again, with goldfield options,
Were your cheque-book not secured by Holmes’s desk lock;¹⁰

If you can take on cases of great gravity,¹¹
Though with your practice you are not absorbed;¹²
If you can spy a widow’s tasteless levity,
Yet shrug politely of your own accord;¹³
If you can fill The Strand and others’ pages
With sixty stories of the science of deduction,¹⁴
You’ll be the one fixed point in a changing age,¹⁵
And — which is more, my Sons — you will be Watson!

Please raise your glasses. To Dr. J.H. Watson.¹⁶

¹ See Vincent Starrett, 221B (1942); but see Michael H. Kean, “And It Is Always . . .” Eighteen Eighty-nine, 63 Baker St. J. 20 (Winter 2013). Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle played golf together in 1894 and corresponded thereafter. Daniel Stashower, Teller of Tales 185-86 (1999). This toast was inspired in part by speculation that Kipling was the true author of at least some of the Canon. See James G. Ravin, Did Watson Really Write the Canon?, 30 Baker St. J. 94 (June 1980); see also O.F. Grazebrook, Studies in Sherlock Holmes (1949; Magico reprint 1981). “If—” was first published in “Rewards and Fairies” (1910).

² The Sign of Four.

³ The Adventure of Black Peter.

⁴ The Reigate Puzzle.

⁵ The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot.

⁶ The Dying Detective.

⁷ The Adventure of the Three Garridebs.

⁸ A Study in Scarlet; The Sign of Four; The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor.

⁹ The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place.

¹⁰ The Beryl Coronet; The Adventure of the Dancing Men. See S.E. Dahlinger, Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Bea (*sic*), 56 Baker St. J. 6, 15-16 (Autumn 2006).

¹¹ A Case of Identity.

¹² The Red-Headed League. See, e.g., S.C. Roberts, Holmes & Watson 82-83 (1953).

¹³ The Valley of Fear.

¹⁴ A Study in Scarlet.

¹⁵ His Last Bow.

¹⁶ This toast contains allusions to at least 15 Canonical stories. Sherlockians more knowledgeable than I am can surely find more. There are just three stanzas in the toast — rather than four as in Kipling’s original — in order to keep it under the two-minute toast mandate. See email from Robert Katz to Tim Greer et al. (April 9, 2016) (“Sons of the Copper Beeches---Toasts for April 15 Meeting”).