

Honoring the Colonels
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by Will Walsh

We are always in search for heroes; men and women who provide examples of character and integrity; people who step forward and provide a bright and shining example for each of us. From the earliest tales by Homer to fiction and non-fiction writing today, we desire individuals who offer profiles in courage. We seek people who serve as role models and inspire us through their actions to be better people.

Unfortunately, Evy asked me to toast the colonels of the Canon.

One expects individuals of a certain rank to be the very model of the modern English gentleman with the dignity associated with the rank. The colonels of the Canon, unfortunately, only get worse as you consider them. The Canon opens with Col. Openshaw, a “quick-tempered, very foul-mouthed” individual who fought for the Confederacy and left the United States due to his “aversion to the negroes.” Col. Openshaw’s end is hardly surprising, and, similarly, Col. James Barclay suffers the consequences for his past evil. Col. Lysander Stark proves a foreign counterfeiter and vicious killer, while Col. Valentine Walter is responsible for the death of his brother as he commits treason and sells military plans to a foreign agent. The list of colonels drops to its nadir with Col. Moriarty and Col. Sebastian Moran, “the second most dangerous man in London.”

For the front line colonels, Col. Emsworth may be the most positive character in the Canon as he only locked his son away. So, let’s depart from these ranks and seek a positive role model.

Instead, please consider a “big, masterful aristocrat,” known for his “pleasant, mellow voice” and “honest personality.” Dr. Watson informs us that frankness shines from his gray, Irish eyes and this individual approaches Holmes at the request of a friend in the defense of a young woman at risk to the most dangerous man in Europe. We learn that this gentleman can be trusted with items of great value. While remaining resolute in his protection of his good friend, the gentleman’s integrity prevents him from allowing an error to stand and corrects Holmes.

So, as we once again gather with friends, please raise your glass to toast a gentleman of honor and integrity who holds the respect and trust of a “loyal friend and a chivalrous gentleman.” Ladies and gentlemen, to Colonel Sir James Damery.