

A Sherlockian Toast (posted 2023-6-18)

A Toast to Louisa “Touie” Hawkins Conan Doyle
The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes – 21 November 2021
Zoom

Ross E. Davies

Louisa Hawkins was born in England in the mid-19th century, married in 1885, first published under her own name in 1896, and died in 1906.

She was not a very famous person. But she was a tough and kind person, and a creative one. And she should be more famous than she is.

In 1893, after what had been, by all accounts, eight years of healthy, happy marriage and parenthood, Louisa was diagnosed with tuberculosis and told by her doctors that she had only a few months to live.

She and her family promptly left England for what were believed to be the healthier, even therapeutic air, of Switzerland.

After brief a return to England, she and her husband then departed on a years-long visit to the Middle East, both to satisfy his passion for adventure and to give her lungs another atmosphere in which perhaps to survive a bit longer, if not recover.

You will have noticed that Louisa had already long outlasted her doctors' predictions of her life span.

While in Egypt, she and her spouse composed a poem to mail to friends as a New Year's greeting for 1896. Here it is:

When on us your card you drops
You pass the house of Mr. Cheops;
Then on your left you bring to view
The Bungalow of friend Chefru,
Next door to whom Miss Sphinx has got
An eligible building lot.
These are our pals and if you call
We'll introduce you to them all,
And let you use our golf links, too,
Straight from our door to Timbuctoo,
And so adieu!
 May Fortune's tricks
Leave you unharmed in '96.
It was signed.

A. & L. Conan Doyle.

Yes, Arthur Conan Doyle was Louisa's spouse.

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Louisa continued to confound the medical professionals for another decade after that, before finally succumbing to the deadly disease that had plagued her for almost 15 years.

The inscription on her gravestone read:

In loving memory of
Louise Conan Doyle [Yes, her first name was misspelled!]
who died July 4th 1906
Erected by her sorrowing husband
Arthur Conan Doyle
Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven

It could've also said, "In honor of the only woman — THE Woman! — to share a byline with Arthur Conan Doyle."

And so I propose today to toast Louisa Hawkins, survivor and author extraordinaire. And also, in her spirit, to add a couplet to her poem:

May Fortune true be good to you in '22.

Please raise your glasses — to Louisa Hawkins!

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