

Toast to Dr. John H. Watson
Sons of the Copper Beeches
October 28, 2022

Fellow Sherlockians, I invite you to play a game.

The mind reels, no? No, not the sort of pursuit where a lucky (or unlucky) individual is “clapped down in a third-class carriage on the Underground, and asked to give the trades of all his fellow-travellers.”

Instead, this game would take as its object the staunch speaker of that phrase. Consider the personalities of fellow-travelers, fitted snugly into a commuter rail, trying and often failing to block out all surrounding stimuli, including above all *other people*.

Few things are more dubiously scrutinized than a fellow explorer about to “share your armrest”—or share their opinions.

Dr. John H. Watson, however, would be more than equal to any personality who ventured into his economy—or economy plus—sphere.

An acutely anxious passenger? We can all envision the calming effect that the sturdy doctor could have on a high-strung seatmate.

An overly gregarious seatmate? We know that Watson would be the most self-effacing audience. If asked afterwards how he endured it, he would likely modestly demur that “Such was my humble role in our alliance.”

A military guest? Kith and kin.

An astronomer? Watson would be *thrilled* to be in proximity to an individual who is aware that the Earth revolves around the sun.

A temperance advocate? ...well my, we’re almost out of time!

In “Song of the Open Road,” Walt Whitman exhorts:

“[W]ill you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?”

Dr John H. Watson weathers injury, witnessing death in battle, chronic pain, uncertain financial solvency, bereavement, a flatmate who furnishes more than his share of challenge, and unremitting encounters with a full range of perfidy that humans are capable of. Yet, he is a fixed agile and steadfast one—not one to break under an east wind, but rather to withstand and to rebound.

As travelers go, one could do worse than Dr. John H. Watson. In fact, one could hardly do better than to learn from him, and with him, as Sherlock Holmes does, and as we fortunate readers do. Let us toast to Dr. John H. Watson!