



LOT 151

DOYLE, SIR ARTHUR CONAN.

"A STUDY IN SCARLET" [IN] BEETON'S CHRISTMAS ANNUAL. TWENTIETH-EIGHTH SEASON. WARD, LOCK AND CO., [NOVEMBER], 1887

8vo (214 x 140mm.), the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes, inscribed by the author on front endpaper ("This is the very first | independent book of | mine which ever was | published | Arthur Conan Doyle. | Jan 9 / 14"), frontispiece and text illustrations by D.H. Friston engraved by W.M.R. Quick, other texts illustrated by other artists, with 4pp. (out of a possible 12) of "Beeton's Christmas Annual Advertiser" and other inserted advertisements (two of them chromolithographed) at the beginning and end, bound by Zaehnsdorf (probably at the same time as the inscription) in three-quarter morocco gilt preserving the original upper and lower colour-printed wrappers, new endpapers, in exceptionally fine condition

ESTIMATE 250,000 - 400,000 GBP

PROVENANCE

unknown British bookseller; sold c.1960 to the Newcastle-on-Tyne bookseller Harold Hill; from whom acquired by the "Baker Street Irregular" William S. Hall' (d.1971) [see *The Baker Street Journal* volume 13, number 2, new series, 1963 pp.112-114, quoted below]; acquired from his Estate by William R. Smith, associate conductor of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra and also "Baker Street Irregular" (d.1993); acquired from his widow by the present owner

"...Some few years ago, Harold Hill, rare books and antiques dealer of Newcastle-on-Tyne, told me of a long run of Conan Doyle first editions in the hands of another British bookseller. Each copy was bound in half morocco, with the original covers bound in, and each was inscribed by the author. The books had to be bought as a lot, and I've forgotten the figure quoted, but it was prodigious. I said I was interested only in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* containing *A Study in Scarlet*, and after considerable haggling I secured it..." (William S. Hall, *Baker Street Journal*, 1963)

LITERATURE

Randall Stock, *Beeton's Christmas Annual 1887: An Annotated Checklist and Census*, R20 (this copy); De Waal 416; Lilly *Detective Fiction* 16
Martin Booth. *The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle*. London, 1997
Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Doyle, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan (1859-1930)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edition, January 2009
Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson. *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle*, Oxford, 1983
Andrew Lycett. *Conan Doyle. The Man who Created Sherlock Holmes*, London, 2007

CATALOGUE NOTE

"...*There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it...*" (Sherlock Holmes, in *A Study in Scarlet*)

apart from the author's own copy, this is currently the only known inscribed copy of the first printing of the first Sherlock Holmes story: the debut of the best known literary character of all time.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a respected, but not highly successful doctor in his middle-thirties, married for less than a year, living at Southsea in Hampshire, when he started writing the story on 8 March 1886 which would become, less than three weeks later, the novella *A Study in Scarlet*. Originally called *A Tangled Skein* the author changed the title based on his own detective's comment "the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life". Doyle was unaware of it at the time, but this story pulsating with "excitement, interest and humour" (Lycett p.118)-- was undoubtedly the most important book he ever wrote: it gave birth to Sherlock Holmes, outlined how he and Watson came to be together and "set in motion one of the most astonishingly successful characters in English Literature, a forerunner of everyone from Hercule Poirot to James Bond. In other words, Conan Doyle created the first major serial character" (Martin Booth, p.108).

"...*His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch...*" (Watson describing his first meeting with Holmes, in *A Study in Scarlet*)

A Study in Scarlet begins with Dr Watson finding himself in London, having been invalided out of the army following an injury at the battle of Maiwand. He learns from his old dresser at St Bartholomew's Hospital that an eccentric-sounding friend, a dabbler in the laboratory with a "passion for definite and exact knowledge", is looking for someone to share his rooms at 221B Baker Street. When subsequently introduced to Holmes Watson finds him

among the Bunsen burners in the hospital, seeking a new way of detecting bloodstains which will supersede all other known methods. His first remark setting the benchmark of course for all future first meetings is the classic "How are you? You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive..." Immediately Holmes is established -- as he is later described in "A Scandal in Bohemia" -- as "the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen".

The plot of the story, with its American flashback section and use of a religious sect (the Mormons) as a king-pin, was somewhat derived from Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* published the previous year. Nonetheless it contained all the elements which would become familiar and so appealing in the later stories: "Watson is a doubter, Sherlock Holmes is shrewd and clever, the police are bumblingly over-confident...Holmes and Watson [are] together in Holmes's rooms when a client arrives. They go to a scene of the crime or mystery, Holmes poses a series of idiosyncratic and seemingly obscure questions to a bewildered Watson, there are one or two sequence of action, the obvious solution is turned on its head by a sudden revelation then, back in Baker Street, Sherlock Holmes concludes the investigation. It was a winning formula" (Booth, *op.cit.*)

Doyle first sent the story for serialisation to the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, James Payn, who in 1883 had given Doyle his first real break by publishing his story "J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement" and introducing him to literary circles. Payn thought the story too short for serialisation but too long for a single issue and rejected it. Over the next few months Doyle sent it to a number of publishers, including Arrowsmiths (who are said to have returned it without reading it, still intact in the cardboard tube) and Frederick Warne & Co (who turned it down immediately). Then in September 1886 he sent it to Ward, Lock & Co, who had a reputation, in the author's words, of making a "specialty of cheap and often sensational literature". The editor-in-chief, Professor G.T. Bettany, gave the story to his wife, who was a published novelist and short story writer in her own right. She is said to have approved of it instantly, and on 30 October 1886 Ward Lock offered £25 for the copyright. Although the author requested royalties, this was turned down on the grounds that the story may have to be included with others in an annual, and this "might give rise to some confusion" (quoted by Green & Gibson, p.10). Doyle decided to accept the terms probably because he felt he had no alternative if he wanted to get the story into print -- and on 30th November the contract was signed. The story, however, was not published until November 1887 when it appeared, together with two short plays by R. André and C.J. Hamilton and other minor articles, in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, a miscellany published every year since 1860, founded by Samuel Orchart Beeton, husband of the Isabella Mary Beeton of *Household Management* fame.

The issue sold out in fourteen days: this was probably as much to do with the perennial popularity of the annual itself as the appeal of Sherlock Holmes and "A Study in Scarlet". Not being a full-length work the story was not reviewed widely, although the *Scotsman* declared the author showed genius and the *Hampshire Post* praised it fulsomely. Ward Lock subsequently republished it as an individual volume in July 1888 (illustrated by the author's father Charles Doyle, then in an asylum), and the first of the reprints appeared in 1889. Of course Conan Doyle never received a penny more for the work, having given up all rights for his £25. He never used the same publishers again; the success of the story, however, enabled him to sell his next full-length novel, *The Sign of Four*, to Lippincott's Magazine, which in turn led to the publication of the Holmes stories in *The Strand Magazine* from July 1891 onwards, where their readership and fame grew and they attained a huge popular audience, with massive queues at newstands. Holmes grew so popular so quickly that Doyle feared he would never be known for anything else, leading him to confront his detective with the evil genius of Professor Moriarty and their apparent mutual destruction in "The Final Problem" (*Strand Magazine*, December 1893).

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had first conceived of writing a tale of detective fiction in 1886, having learnt the economics of the short story from his reading of the work of Guy de Maupassant and the Edinburgh medical journals "with their logical progress from case-statement to collection of symptoms, rival diagnoses, and finally to ultimate conclusion and explanation. His first translation of these techniques into fiction ended in what is now called *A Study in Scarlet*" (Owen Dudley Edwards, *Oxford DNB*). At the time Doyle considered other detective stories on the market dull and unimaginative, but the form had been established between 1841 and 1844 with five short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, featuring his astute and analytic detective Auguste Dupin (Poe himself had been inspired by the memoirs of Eugène Vidocq, head of the French Brigade de Sureté, the first police officer to compile a criminal database). Doyle always owned his great debt to Poe, commenting at the centenary of Poe's birth in March 1909 that his stories were "one of the great landmarks and starting points in the literature of the past century...Where was the detective story until Poe breathed the breath of life into it?" (quoted by Booth, p.105). But there were other influences working on Doyle at the time, including Émile Gaboriau (whose detective Monsieur Lecoq, first appearing in *L'Affair Lerouge* in 1866, was, like Holmes, a keen observer and deducer), Charles Dickens (who created the first memorable detective

in English Literature, Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* in 1853) and of course Wilkie Collins (whose fine novel *The Moonstone*, featuring Sergeant Cuff, had appeared in 1868).

There have been many conjectures about the origin of the name "Sherlock Holmes". Did the detective's first name come from the village in County Kildare called Sherlockstown? Was it a cricketer (as Doyle himself once claimed)? Was it the violinist Alfred Sherlock? One of the Irish Catholic Divines bearing the name whom the author came across at Stonyhurst? Or the "Chief Inspector Sherlock" mentioned in connection with a criminal investigation reported in the Portsmouth *Evening News* of 4 January 1883? For his surname, there may be more certainty, and the most likely source seems to be the American writer and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes, of whom Doyle wrote, in *Through the Magic Door*, that "Never have I so known and loved a man whom I had never seen". Doyle had hoped to visit Holmes during his first visit to the United States in 1894, but the American writer within five days of his arrival on 2 October. Doyle paid a visit to Holmes's grave in Mount Auburn Cemetery on the last day of the same month, leaving a floral wreath and note from the Society of Authors.

For the detective himself, whom his creator marked out at an early stage as also a philosopher, a violin collector and an amateur chemist, most authorities believe his workaholic and somewhat neurotic character to be based upon an amalgam of Conan Doyle (like his fictional creation a person of an ordered and meticulous mind, and a great, though untidy keeper of records) and his old professor and mentor whilst at medical school at Edinburgh University, Dr Joseph Bell (1837—1911), a "sparse and lean man with the long and sensitive fingers of a musician" (Booth), an outstanding doctor and scientist, and a pioneer of forensic science. According to Bell the basis of all successful medical diagnoses was the "precise and intelligent recognition and appreciation of minor differences" (see Bell's article "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes", in the *Bookman*, December 1892). Was this not precisely what was required of a detective? (see Lycett, p.110).

"...Gaboriau had rather attracted me by the neat dovetailing of his plots, and Poe's masterful detective, M. Dupin, had from boyhood been one of my heroes. But could I bring an addition of my own? I thought of my old teacher, Joe Bell, of his eagle face, of his curious ways, of his eerie trick of spotting details. If he were a detective he would surely reduce this fascinating but unorganised business to something nearer to an exact science..." (Conan Doyle, in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures*)

"...I thought I would try my hand at writing a story, where the hero would treat crime as Dr Bell treated disease, and where science would take the place of chance" (Conan Doyle, speaking on a gramophone record near the end of his life)

Whoever inspired him, Conan Doyle had created almost overnight what was to be the best known literary figure of all time: a character so compelling and so complex that many were to believe that Sherlock Holmes was a real person (even as late as the 1950s the English post office was still receiving many letters personally addressed to the detective). No such fictional character had ever become so widely known in such a short space of time.

Almost as important to the success of the stories was the relationship between Holmes and Watson. One of Doyle's favourite books was Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and his own fiction reflects something of the same interplay of contrasting personalities (with the opposing poles of mind and heart), the diligent chronicling of a friend's mercurial exploits (and human failings), and altogether writing with a "similar blend of comedy, pathos, and psychological insight" (Lycett, p.116).

Over the course of the next forty years a total of sixty Holmes stories were to appear, all eagerly awaited by a worldwide readership. The character appeared in stage adaptations from 1893 onwards, and became the subject of scores of plays, films and television versions: there were 115 silent films alone. Holmes' almost independent life as a dramatic character continues to this day, most recently in the Guy Ritchie film *Sherlock Holmes*, starring Robert Downey, Jr. and Jude Law as the detective and Watson respectively. In 2010 a new modern-day version of the stories is set to appear on the BBC. Each new generation of actors and directors, it seems, seeks to re-interpret Holmes in much the same way as the great heroes of Shakespeare.

"...Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize

him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic..." (Watson describing Holmes' working methods in *A Study in Scarlet*)

Supplementing this, innumerable books have been published on his "life", and countless societies have sprung up around the globe celebrating the detective's character and adventures. There are, for instance, over 300 active Holmesian societies in the United States alone.

The Beeton's "Study in Scarlet" has always been one of the rarest books of modern times (as Vincent Starrett said, a "keystone sought by discriminating collectors in every part of the world"). Randall Stock, in his *Annotated Checklist and Census* (2008) records 20 copies in libraries in the UK and America (though none in the British Library, whose copy was destroyed by enemy action in the war), and eleven (including the present copy) owned by private collectors. Stock records three signed or inscribed copies (again, including the present one), but one of these (R16, held at the Beinecke Library at Yale) was mutilated, having had its inscribed page ("With the Author's Compliments") excised at some point before March 2003, when the theft was discovered. Another copy, apparently the author's own, (R19, inscribed "Return to Dr A. Conan Doyle") is in the possession of the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle (the author's youngest daughter, who died in November 1997). The present copy is therefore one of only two signed or inscribed copies currently known.

Doyle dates his inscription 9 January 1914. Eight days later the author and his second wife Jean were visited at their house at Windlesham by Doyle's son by his first marriage, the 21 year-old Kingsley Doyle, then taking a break from his own medical studies. Other family members already there included the author's brother Innes, who noted in his diary for the same day that "Arthur read them all three chapters of his book about the 'Scourers'": this turned out to be the final long Sherlock Holmes adventure *The Valley of Fear*, serialized in 1914-15. Like *The Study in Scarlet*, it too was to be a cross-continental revenge mystery, also with the action split between an English and an American location. There is perhaps something fitting in the fact that Doyle has inscribed the present edition, the first long Sherlock Holmes adventure, at just the time he was composing with a similar plot structure in mind his fourth and final long adventure, twenty-eight years later. Doyle was converted late to a belief in the German threat in the years before 1914. He retained, among other things, fond memories of his Jesuit schooldays among German speakers and was inspired by Goethe and Heine. But the forthcoming war perhaps presaged in his own pre-war stories reflecting a disintegrating world was to bring him, like so many others, grave sorrow: Kingsley died in 1918 aggravated by war wounds, and Innes, a general, died of pneumonia in the wake of the conflict.

"[Doyle] believed his works stood in a great tradition but "also that they were accessible rather than elitist. He read, as he wrote, for everybody" (Owen Dudley Edwards, op.cit.)

AUTHENTICATION

Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 1887, inscribed