

Another Exciting Sherlockian Round-Robin Pastiche
- by Members of The Pleasant Places of Florida. -



**The
Bourbon Bullion
Bafflement**

- 1996 -

Contributing Authors

Introduction: Benton Wood

Continuation I: C. Michael Carroll

Continuation II: Michael Bryan

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Continuation IV: Caroline Everett

Conclusion: Wanda Dow

All of the above are ~~Members~~ of The Pleasant Places of Florida, a "certified" Scion of The Baker Street Irregulars. The PPoFF was founded, in 1972, by Leslie Marshall, B.S.I. ("A Scandal in Bohemia")

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Pleasant Places of Florida

"The Bourbon Bullion Bafflement"

Introduction

by Benton Wood

I was at "sixes and sevens", as they say, that day in late April of 1912. My friend, Sherlock Holmes, was firmly ensconced in his retirement villa on the Sussex Downs, while my practice had slowed to a snail's pace. I was itching for a bit of excitement.

My wife, always in need of a few "quid" to sustain her incessant shopping sprees, cajoled me into making a visit to our bank, Cox & Co. I was delighted to get out of the house. I then hailed a pre-auto handsome hansom cab and proceeded to the bank in Charing Cross. After completing my transaction I decided to check out my old Army Dispatch Box, which was kept in the safety deposit vault.

I riffled through the stack of "yet-untold" Cases of Sherlock Holmes, and came upon one such Case, which was stuck between the "Litmus-Test Murder" (NAVA) and "The Adventure of the Two Coptic Patriarchs" (RETI). With the greatest of care, I delicately untied the faded blue ribbon, which bound several sheets of foolscap, revealing a narrative I had recorded many years ago but had long-since forgotten. Secreted among the pages I found a note, which was written in Holmes' inimitable scrawl - **"Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons, with the greatest for the last."** It reminded me of our adventure involving "The Red Circle". I then began to read:

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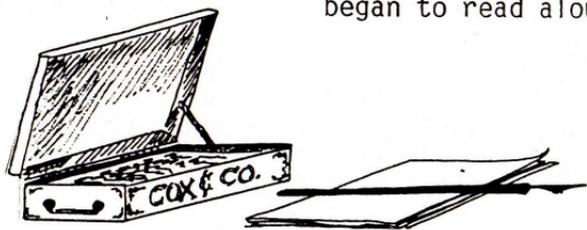
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This exciting adventure took place some years ago when I was sharing "digs" with my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, at 221-B Baker Street. The afternoon post had brought a singular epistle addressed:

"Mr. S. Holmes, Esq., Baker Street - London, N.W.1."

The envelope was franked with a common ha-penny stamp bearing the profile of a young Victoria, and carried a City cancel, indicating it was posted that morning. It bore neither a sender's name nor a return address.

With magnifying lens in hand, Holmes examined the envelope in his usual meticulous manner, then opened it cautiously, and delicately extracted the letter. He began to read aloud



Continuation I

by C. Michael Carroll

London, the 13th inst.

My dear Mr. Holmes,

I hope that you will pardon in me the temerity of addressing you in this manner. The situation in which I find myself is so outre that you may not wish to be associated with it. Or, you may think that I am unbalanced and my mind has been overly burdened. In any case, I have decided to toss my 'bonnet over the windmill' and trust in that discretion that I understand you extend to all of your clients. I must say, Monsieur Holmes, that this matter is of the gravest importance, not only for myself, but possibly on the international plane as well.

Briefly, if you will interest yourself in this affaire, I ask that you meet with me this evening, so that I may elucidate on the facts pertinent to this matter. If you would station yourself at the west terminus of Parliament Bridge, on the north side, I will meet you at the sixth hour this evening.

Your absence shall mean to me your choice not to accept the commission.

[Unsigned]

"Well, Watson, what do you make of that?"

"A Macedonian cry, Holmes, from someone in desperate straits. 'Come over into Macedonia and help us,' - the plaintiff cry Saint Paul heard in his dream. That much seems plain as a pikestaff to me."

"Quite so, Watson, very astute. Written - scrawled, one might say - by a woman of advanced age, or under great stress, perhaps both. Certainly not English; nor Macedonian, either. French, I venture to say. The writer has not quite mastered the English idiom. Hmm. notepaper of superior quality," holding it up to the light. "Aha! Part of a watermark! The top portion of the sheet has been cut off, leaving part of a Coat of Arms. A remnant of a motto read: 'Fes... ..te'. No difficulty here. It should fully read: 'Festina Lente'. I'll wager it's the motto of the d'Esterville family."

Down came the Commonplace Book from the shelf. A quick thumb-through produced the desired confirmation.

"Just as I thought," Holmes exclaimed, citing his reference. "D'Esterville. French noble family. Emigrés to England in 1792. Condemned to the guillotine in absentia. Count Frederic Maurice, his wife, Marie, and ten children all removed to this country, and became British subjects."

"For several generations they were patrons of the Vernet family, of my lineage as you well know, Watson. A number of the old Count's descendants changed their name to 'Lenfestey', when they became subjects of the British king, but I believe the eldest son and his descendants kept their French names & titles. For years, rumors abounded that they were entrusted by Louis XVI, with gold bullion from the Treasury along with some of the royal regalia, none of which ever surfaced after the Revolution, either here or back in France. If our correspondent is indeed a d'Esterville, this could indeed prove to be a most intriguing case. What say you, Watson? Shall we keep this rendez-vous with our mysterious correspondent?"

"Right on, Holmes! Hugo - I go! To the Victor go the spoils!."

"C'est affreux - misérable, mon ami. It's settled then. We have two hours - then off to Westminster."

As we made ready, I noticed that Holmes slipped a pistol into his pocket. I gave him a quizzical glance.

"Yes, Watson. I rather think your old service revolver would be a worthy companion this evening."

We took a cab to Westminster and positioned ourselves at the spot requested. Just as the last stroke of six faded away, an ornately-appointed barouche came across the bridge from the Albert Embankment, coming to a stop at the kerb where we stood. "Mr. Holmes?" asked the driver. As he spoke, the door opened and a gloved hand extended bidding us to enter.

We climbed aboard, and sat side by side facing a veiled and hooded small figure. Holmes spoke: "May we have the pleasure of knowing whom we have been asked to assist?" Hood, veil and gloves were gracefully abandoned. Holmes and I gasped in astonishment as we found ourselves looking into the face of.....



Continuation II

by Michael Bryan

.... a remarkably lovely, regal woman, auburn-haired and of delicate features.

"Good evening, Mr. Holmes. Thank you for responding to my plea. I am Mademoiselle Jacqueline d'Ester-ville."

Holmes cast a knowing glance at me as he removed his hat and inclined his head toward the young lady.

"I hope I may be of service to you. Please let me present my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson."

"A pleasure, sir." she replied. "I've often read your accounts of Mr. Holmes's cases, and it was because of them that I thought that if anyone could shed light upon my dark situation it surely must be your friend."

"You may rest assured that he will not disappoint you, madam, I replied.

"In your letter," Holmes interjected, "you spoke of a question of grave importance. Would you explain more fully upon that point?"

"Of course, Mr. Holmes. I will not only speak, I will show you." She reached into her handbag and removed a folded piece of white cloth.

"This is the question of grave importance."

Holmes took the cloth from her hand and spread it out upon his knee. Even in the dim light, I could perceive the cloth was linen, and apparently of some age. It was slightly soiled and the edges frayed. Its most singular feature, however, was the strange geometrical pattern drawn upon its surface. The design appeared to be drawn by hand, in black ink, with annotations written in red containing Latin phrases and mottoes.

"A curious exhibit, mademoiselle," said Holmes.

"It is a key, Mr. Holmes, though to what lock it fits and opens, I cannot say. This I do know - if you can decipher this enigma, it likely will lead to the recovery of the French royal treasure, hidden now for over a century."

Holmes's piercing grey eyes studied this mysterious young woman. Then a slight smile came to his lips. "Indeed, mademoiselle? You intrigue me."

"It is quite true," she rejoined. "One of my ancestors hastily removed to England at the time of the Revolution during the reign of Louis XVI - a period of terrible chaos and murder. The old Count was entrusted with a considerable amount of the King's gold, which was secreted, upon his arrival in England. The cloth, you now hold, is a map, of sorts, recording the location of the treasure. The gold was so well hidden that very few of the family descendants were privy to the cryptic meaning recorded on the cloth."

"And you are a descendant of Count Frederic Maurice d'Esterville?" Holmes queried.

"Why, yes, Mr. Holmes. I am that last direct lineal descendant. The cloth came into my possession only recently from my late uncle, who was familiar with its history, which he passed on to me.

Holmes smiled more broadly at her words.

"Why do you smile, sir? I am quite serious."

"I am sure you are, my dear. I have not the least doubt. I am smiling only in satisfaction of having my conjecture confirmed. This case is most reminiscent of another of many years ago," Holmes explained.

"Will you help me, Mr. Holmes - please?"

"As you request, I shall look into the matter."

The barouche soon deposited us back to our rooms in Baker Street. We sat down to consider the events of the past few hours. "What do you make of our little conundrum, Holmes?" I asked.

"A pretty puzzle, Watson. Yet it is plain enough that on the morn we must start to untangle this arcane skein at



Continuation - III

by Neil Harvey

.... the Diogenes Club - to confer with Mycroft".

After feasting on one of Mrs. Hudson's delicious, hearty breakfasts of porridge, scones, smoked cod, and black coffee, the famous shamus and I were off on our way to that unique establishment, the Diogenes Club, to meet with Sherlock's remarkable brother, Mycroft.

As we entered the Club, we were warmly greeted by Mycroft, who escorted us to a secluded, richly appointed room where our privacy was assured. Sherlock then apprized his brother of the details regarding the vanished treasure of French monarchy, as related by Madam d'Esterville, the prior evening. He also described the enigmatic cloth map which supposedly held the key to the missing treasure.

"Mycroft, would you be able to offer a suggestion as to where to start this 'treasure hunt'?"

Mycroft sat in thoughtful silence, as his brother unfolded the story. Then he spoke: "I have often heard mention of this so-called 'missing cache of gold' from my colleagues at Whitehall. You must realize that this subject is classified as an Official State Secret, so whatever I impart to you, and the good Doctor, must be held in the strictest confidence." He paused briefly, then slowly continued.

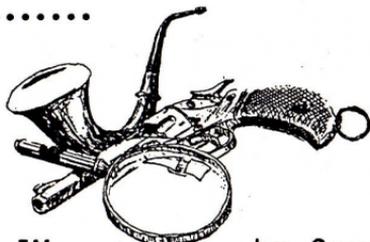
"During those troubled times, Robespierre was determined to eliminate the French Monarchy, along with the aristocrats' excesses and arrogances. As the execution of French nobility proceeded, a small, clandestine organization of English nobles called the 'League of the Scarlet Pimpernel', led by Sir Percy Blakeney, plotted to smuggle Louis and his beauteous wife, Marie Antoinette, out of France to a safe haven in England."

Mycroft continued: "This plan was foiled, as you well know, and it was at this juncture that all trace of the Roi's gold and regalia vanished into thin air."

"How extraordinary!" cried Sherlock. "It is clear to me, dear brother, that the solution to this riddle may well rest at the Blakeney Manor which is, I understand, but 'an hour's carriage drive from London'."

"Quite so, Sherlock," Mycroft languidly replied.

Without further ado, Sherlock sprang to his feet, extended his thanks to his brother for his assistance, as well as for his Club's hospitality, and made a hasty departure. "Come, Watson, the game's indeed afoot!; we have found the lock!; we possess the key!; now we must repair to



Continuation IV

by **Caroline Everett**

... Baker Street to confirm my suspicion that the Honorable Sir Percy Blakeney would never have kept the French King's ransom while so many of his own countrymen were emigrés in England. He said no more 'til the hansom arrived back at our familiar door. Holmes bounded up the stairs and entered the sitting room. He seized the Almanac de Gotha and The Commonplace Book from their shelves, and silently began to peruse their well-worn pages.



"Just as I thought, Watson," said Holmes, breaking the silence, "the brother-in-law of Sir Percy was a French republican whom he rescued from the guillotine. His name was Armand St. Just, and, as he remained in England, his descendants are listed here. One of them, most likely Sir Charles St. Just, an official of the Bank of England, may have the key to this puzzle."

"But where is the King's ransom, Holmes?" I asked. "Is it in heaven or is it in Hell? Why would the St. Justs keep it hidden from their fellow exiles? How do we decipher the encoded message on the cloth map?"

Without delay Holmes arranged an appointment with Sir Charles St. Just, and soon we were off to the "Old Lady of Threadneedle Street". We were ushered into an imposing office. Before us stood Sir Charles, a tall, portly figure with dark eyes and graying hair. He waved us to chairs, while he himself settled into a plush leather chair behind a massive, mahogany desk. He then listened, without comment, as Holmes related the salient details of our outre case.

"You are correct, Mr. Holmes," said Sir Charles. "I am in possession of this treasure. No map is necessary - as it lies below us in my vault. What can this young woman be up to by enlisting your assistance to unearth the treasure?"

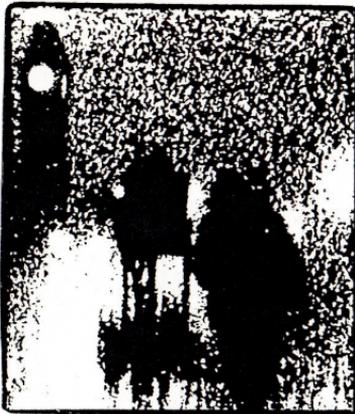
"That is easily answered," replied Holmes. "I fear she is not a d'Esterville at all. My research reveals that the line died out with her so-called 'uncle'. She is an adventuress seeking to lay her purloining paws upon the auric bullion of the Bourbons."

"If she is under the impression that it consists of gold bullion, she is mistaken, Holmes, old man."

Sir Charles rang a silver bell, and a dignified, elderly man, in a frock coat, entered the office.

"Be so good, Johnson, as to fetch the leather box from my vault," ordered the banker, as he handed him a small key, "and, Johnson, please ask Mrs. Estes if she would serve tea." When Mr. Johnson returned bearing a large leather container, Sir Charles opened it with yet another key he extracted from his waistcoat fob.

Peering into the box, we observed, with astonishment, that the King's ransom was actually



Conclusion

by Wanda Dow

.... a packet of yellow-aged "Assignats"! I carefully leafed through the papers. "What are these?," I cried, "I don't understand."

Holmes let out a sharp laugh, "Ha!, perhaps we should allow our employer to have these after all!" He picked up a few of the sheets and held them up to the light. "Here was the hope of pre-Revolution France, Watson."

"Please forgive my ignorance as to the meaning of these curious certificates, Holmes. Please elucidate."

It was Sir Charles who explained. "At one point, when the French Legislative Assembly thought merely to limit the executive authority of the monarchy, rather than delete it entirely, it passed one of the Articles giving it the right to confiscate all ecclesiastical property. It was these Church assets that were to back the issuance of a new form of paper currency, called 'assignats'. This was no inconsiderable amount - about ten percent of the nation's wealth. Shortly before the acceptance of the initial draft of the Constitution, Roi Louis became privy to this currency scheme and obtained a large amount of this new scrip for his protection along with his family and the 2nd Estate."

Holmes interrupted, "Just as Louis XVI predicted: 'après moi, le déluge'! The Revolution - Robespierre and his Reign of Terror, au revoir, Marie Antoinette; adieu, Louis, along with about 17,000 others. These assignats are now worth little more than the paper on which they are printed."

"Speaking of paper," Sir Charles interjected, "how the devil did this woman obtain the d'Esterville stationery in order to contact you?"

"A former employee, perhaps," Holmes conjectured. "Since the note she sent me contained only the lower portion of the family crest, she most likely obtained a short Letter of Reference and then cut off the original note using the bottom half to pique my interest."

"No doubt she knew that you would deduce all this from a precise examination of the notepaper," I said.

"Correct, my dear Doctor," the Secretary's voice came from behind me. As I started to turn, I felt the cold circle of metal of a gun barrel against my neck. "And now, gentlemen, if you will be so kind as to follow Monsieur Holmes's suggestion, and give to me the so-called worthless papers."

Sir Charles reached over and closed the box. "For what purpose, madam? They are indeed valueless."

"Then you will not mind parting with them," she said. "One fool's garbage ... as they say, no?"

"I commend you on the disguise you employed the other evening," Holmes complimented her. "Since you're about to walk out of here with what you so desperately desired, would you mind clearing up a few things? Let us consider it as payment for services rendered."

"Very well," she agreed, continuing to hold me hostage. "You say these papers are worthless," she explained. "To you, yes. But to those still true to the cause of freedom of the people, however, the box contains the names of traitors with lands that are rightfully ours."

"You mean to say that the Jacobins still exist?", Sir Charles asked, surprised at this revelation.

"Indeed they do, to right wrongs yet outstanding," she almost spat her words.

"Aha! I see," said Holmes. "While Sir Charles's ancestor, Armand St. Just, was rescued, yours was not."

"Mais oui, monsieur," she replied with unbridled passion. "Louis Antoine Leon de Saint-Just. The very next day after his arrest, he was executed."

"That is true," Sir Charles stated, "I remember reading of the incident in my family diary. His rescue was planned, but he was executed so quickly, there was no time to spirit him away to safety."

I felt the gun waver slightly at this news.

"What are you saying?," her voice trembled with incredulity. "No! I ..."

A moment's hesitation was all I needed to push my chair backwards so forcefully that she staggered off-balance, thus giving Holmes the opportunity of relieving her of the pistol.

The Constabulary was duly summoned. She did not speak again until two constables started to lead her to the door. "It was Louis Antoine who was to be rescued, but Armand selfishly took his place," she said.

"If you had confronted me as family," Sir Charles called after her, "instead of hiding behind the skirts of trickery, I would have shown you the family diary."

"More lies!," she shouted. "Written by those trying to cover-up their guilty consciences."

"Never mind, Sir Charles," said Holmes. He gently touched the banker's arm. "She's heard her version of the story all her life and will never change."

"Perhaps not," replied Sir Charles, "but this is a terrible misunderstanding and must be corrected." He retrieved his hat and coat. "Please excuse me, gentlemen," and he departed from the room.

"There goes a just man, Watson," Holmes said.

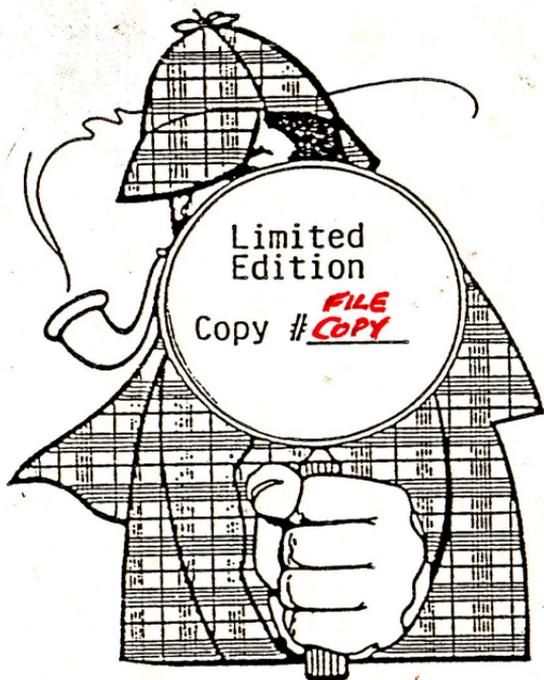
"A Saint-Just, Holmes," I replied.

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PREVIOUS 'Round-Robin' PASTICHES by the PPOFF

1. The Case of the Foreign Cabman (1975)
[Leslie Marshall, Joy Mitchell, Tom Mitchell,
Tom Reesor, Wanda Butts & Paul Gunning.]
2. The Case of the Lost £'s (1976)
[Leslie Marshall, Mike Carroll, Marvin Norton,
Charles Saunders & Harry Seigrist.]
3. The Adventure of the Second Stein (1977)
[John Fought, Ben Wood, Mike Carroll, Ed Morgan,
Joy Mitchell & Tom Mitchell.]
4. The Singular Adv. of the Solitary Balloonist (1977)
[Tom Reesor, Herman Herst, Ben Wood, Caroline
Everett, Mike Carroll & Tom Mitchell.]
5. The Curious Affair of the Witch's Brougham (1978)
[Herman Herst, Svend Petersen, Paul Gunning,
Wanda Butts & Mike Carroll.]
6. The Adventure of the Florid Ians (1979)
[Mike Carroll, Caroline Everett, Helen Swift,
Bill Ward & Wanda Butts.]
7. The Case of the Three Merry Debs (1980)
[George Tullis, Helen Swift, Bill Ward,
Caroline Everett & Wanda Butts.]
8. The Adventure of the Bar's Clue Bungle (1982)
[Ben Wood, Mike Bryan, Helen Swift, John Kalajian,
Wanda Butts, Caroline Everett, Marsha Pollak
& Mike Carroll.]
9. The Adventure of the Pale Ontologist (1987)
[Stephanie Rapp, George Tullis, John Fought, David
McCallister & Caroline Everett.]
10. The Adventure of the Doc-Croaker's Dirk (1991)
[Ben Wood, David McCallister, John Kalajian,
Duane Damon, Judy Buddle & Jeff Dow.]
11. The Sound of the Basket Hills (1994)
[Ben Wood, Tom Takach, Caroline Everett,
Mike Carroll & Wanda (nee Butts) Dow.]
12. A Case of Hide 'n' Tea (1994)
[Jeffrey Dow, Carl Heifetz, Wanda Dow, Bob Ennis,
& Peter Calamai.]



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