A. Conan Doyle, Nineteenth Century Man

Jon Lellenberg & Daniel Stashower

“the little pipe which conveys a tiny rill from inexhaustible reservoirs of eternal truth.”
— A. Conan Doyle, 1884.

Many a Holmesian revisiting A Study in Scarlet, written in March and April of 1886, and published in Bexton’s Christmas Annual for 1887, has wondered about Conan Doyle’s sources for it. The late Jack Tracy wrote, and published himself, Conan Doyle and the Latter-Day Saints, a small book about one aspect, the Mormon element in the novel. He was perfforce speculative because the manuscript has never been seen, and the sole page of notes for the novel which does survive is silent about its American content. Many others have weighed in as well. For example, in Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson: A Textbook of Friendship (1944), the first attempt to annotate the Canon, Christopher Morley opined appealingly:

[Robert Louis Stevenson’s] New Arabian Nights and The Dynamiter had a strong influence on the imagination of young Dr. Doyle. There are many curious blood transfusions in literature. The least successful episode in The Dynamiter was the Mormon fantasy written by Stevenson’s wife: it need not be examined too harshly, since Fanny Stevenson invented it chiefly to amuse her husband while he was ill in bed. But Dr. Doyle was evidently impressed. When he interpolated a Mormon theme into A Study in Scarlet he probably thought he was taking a cue from his much admired fellow alumnus of Edinburgh. Actually he was imitating Mrs. Stevenson… But it is well to remember that in the late Eighties no young writer could possibly take up the pen without having Stevenson in mind. Few writers in any age can set their notions down on paper without either imitating or reacting from what is then fashionable in print.

Perish the thought that we’re suggesting Stevenson wasn’t a factor in Conan Doyle’s thinking as he began to write. We believe Stevenson was, and not out on the Great Alkali Plain alone. But based on our annotation of The Narrative of John Smith, Conan Doyle’s long-lost first attempt at a novel in 1883–84,1 we believe we have a new clue as to the origins of the first Sherlock Holmes tale.

I

John Smith was written in 1883. Its protagonist, a middle-aged Everyman laid up in his boarding-house room for a week by gout, takes this bedridden opportunity to ruminate on many subjects, including religion, medicine and science, literature and the arts, and war and statesmanship. Conan Doyle planned to publish it anonymously, so heterodox did he feel were the views expressed in this novel with a “personal-social-political complexion.” When it was finished, he mailed off the manuscript to a publisher, but it disappeared in the mails, never to be seen again. In spring of 1884 he began rewriting it from memory, but after some 42,000 words he stopped, practically in mid-sentence. He never completed it (nor ever alluded publicly to this rewriting), but he kept the new manuscript close by for years, dipping into it repeatedly for passages that appear in other published work of his.

The manuscript contained, we found, foreshadowings of the Sherlock Holmes tales to come. On page 99 of our edition of The Narrative of John Smith is a passage from it that reads:

— A. Conan Doyle

Whatever may happen in this world, I am convinced that in the next, every male soul will have a female one attached to it, or combined with it, to round it off and give it symmetry. So thought the old Mormon who adduced it as an argument in favour of his creed. ‘You cannot,’ said he, ‘take your money, your railway, or your mining stocks into the next world with you, but our marriage is not only for life but for eternity, and we shall have our wives and children with us, and so make a good start in the world to come.’

A Mormon, even an old one quoted anonymously to support a point of Conan Doyle’s, reminded us of course of the American portion of A Study in Scarlet. We tracked the quotation to a magazine article of January 1884: “A New View of Mormonism” by John W. Barclay, M.P., in a London monthly called The Nineteenth Century. The date meant it could not have appeared in the original version of The Narrative of John Smith, written in 1883, and so was recent reading on Conan Doyle’s part. In other words, he was interested in and reading about Mormons in 1884. (And this was not the sole reference to them in The Narrative of John Smith.)

Barclay gave Nineteenth Century’s

2. Nor was Barclay’s article the only one in Nineteenth Century discussing Mormons. Since Conan Doyle was interested in the American West generally, he likely also read, in March 1882’s issue, “The Yellowstone Geyser” by Francis Francis (sic), with much more about Mormons, the alkali plains, and the dialect of the American West. C. F. Gordon Cumming’s “Locusts and Farmers of America,” January 1883, also touched upon Mormons at one point. And in general terms re: Americans, Conan Doyle may also have noted an observation in George Jacob Holyoake’s “American and Canadian Notes,” August 1885, that “America is a land where human nature, political and social, being at large, some unsolved problems are always on hand there. . . . Devoid alike of king or prelate, without the traditions and authority of throne or mitre, men may do in the United States the thing they will, and, as a rule, they take the opportunity of doing it.” (Especially way out West.)
readers an open-minded account of the Mormon Church's creation, early travails, and migration to Utah, and its settlement there. It also described a regional topography and climate consistent with Conan Doyle's depiction of it in *A Study in Scarlet*. Unlike others of his era, though, Barclay took a sunny view of Utah's Mormons, and their struggles to turn the Salt Lake region into a land of milk and honey. "It is not easy to discover the hostility," he said, "toward the Mormons manifested by Americans in the Eastern states." (By many Britons too, for that matter.) So Barclay's depiction of Utah's Mormons would hardly have suggested the loathsome Enoch Drebber to Conan Doyle, despite Barclay discussing Mormon polygamy at some length, as one reason for the hostility. (Behind it, Barclay suspected Gentile desire to disenfranchise Mormons for their own benefit, where he saw instead a community of model citizens whose one quirk, so to speak, was practiced only by a minority of Mormons, and supported by the women involved.)

Taken by itself, in fact, one might never suspect that the author of *A Study in Scarlet* had ever read Barclay's account of an honest, industrious, sterling community—except that Conan Doyle quoted from it in *The Narrative of John Smith*.

II

He not only quoted from the magazine, he mentioned it by name at another point in this first novel of his, in the passage excerpted at the head of this essay. For young Dr. Conan Doyle, *Nineteenth Century* appears to have been a font of progressive thought suitable for his advanced era (and John Smith's, since the middle-aged Smith was a mouthpiece for Conan Doyle's own 23-year-old opinions about life and the world). The full passage naming the magazine made quite a grandiose claim for it—

There are prophets now as there were prophets then. Our modern prophet wears a broadcloth coat and writes for *The Nineteenth Century*, but he may none the less be the little pipe which conveys a tiny rill from the inexhaustible reservoirs of eternal truth.

—but one actually justified to a surprising extent by the magazine. *Nineteenth Century* was an impressive monthly periodical of public affairs founded in 1877 by architect and editor James (later Sir James) Knowles, who had a particular interest in the conflict between science and religion. Its pages were filled with articles about the leading issues, questions, and controversies of the day, written by scholars, government officials both civilian and military, journalists, clergymen, scientists, doctors, lawyers and judges, conservatives and reformers, and others. Conan Doyle read it admiringly while practicing medicine, and using his free time to establish himself as a writer of fiction, including *A Study in Scarlet*.

To demonstrate further the high regard he had for *Nineteenth Century*, he not only read it, but contributed to it himself once during his Southsea years, an article in August 1888 "On the Geographical Distribution of British Intellect." It was an interesting topic to pursue, at the pivotal age of twenty-nine—perhaps suggestive of a persisting insecurity as a writer, and of being an ambitious Celt striving to make his way in Anglo-Saxon England's professional world. It opened:

Many races have helped in the making of Great Britain, some predominating in one part of the island, and some in another. Amid the conflicting strains of Euskarian, Celt, Pict, Scot, Saxon, Dane, Scandinavian, and Norman, it cannot but be of interest to observe which portions of the country are at the present day most prolific in men of intellect, and what types of mind prevail in the various subdivisions of the United Kingdom.

The first difficulty in such an examination is to draw a hard and fast line as to who shall and who shall not be admitted to be a man of distinguished intellect. Such a division must to a large extent be arbitrary and artificial. For want of a better test, however, it may be taken that the names which we are entitled to use in our calculations are such as could not be excluded from any edition of *Men of the Time* or a good biographical dictionary. This is, of course, but a shifting of the responsibility of selection on to other shoulders, yet it affords a rough test of merit which is exacting enough to serve our purpose.

Then came ten pages of near-stupefying analysis of names, birthplaces, and residences he had unearthed in order to investigate his curious proposition, finally concluding:

it may be briefly summed up that towns have a higher intellectual activity than the country, and that agricultural districts are usually richer in great men than manufacturing or mining parts. The lowlands of Scotland, Aberdeenshire, Dublin, Hampshire, Suffolk, London, Devonshire, Gloucestershire, and Berkshire, are, in the order named, the divisions of the kingdom which have during the last twenty or thirty years produced the most plentiful crop of distinguished citizens. The eastern and southern counties are in the aggregate superior in intelligence to the northern and midland. These in turn are superior to Cornwall and Wales, while the mental nadir is to be found in the western province of Ireland, and signing it A. Conan Doyle, M.D. It’s unclear where he felt this analysis left him—Irish on both parents’ sides, born in Scotland, educated there and in northern England, now living in suburban Hampshire; but at any rate, he could take consolation in the fact that his autodidact mother, as ambitious for him as he was himself, came from eastern, not western, Ireland. And presumably he was pleased by his article prompting two Portsmouth newspaper editorialists, mentions in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and perhaps other London papers, and, in the light-reading periodical *Chat*, an outright parody of his article called “Hampshire on Stilts by Donan Coyle.”

III

What else may Conan Doyle have read in *Nineteenth Century* to inform *A Study in Scarlet*? We found other interesting possibilities, including first of all two articles about the very nature of the literature he was writing at the time, and would write again in his first Sherlock Holmes tale. *Saturday Review of Literature* readers will know that he first submitted *A Study in Scarlet* in 1886 to James Payn, literary adviser to publishers Smith, Elder & Co., and editor of nation’s foremost literary periodical, *The Cornhill Magazine*. The two men had enjoyed cordial relations


---

The Saturday Review
ever since Payn had accepted Conan Doyle’s breakthrough story “J. Habakuk Jephson’s Statement” for Cornhill, where it appeared as the January 1884 issue’s lead item. But Payn turned down A Study in Scarlet, calling it a “shilling dreadful.” Perhaps that was better than “penny fiction,” as Payn scaled literature for the masses, but it also spoke volumes about the fashionability of the day’s sundry literature. “Penny Fiction” was the title of an article by Payn in January 1884’s Nineteenth Century. In the quarter-century since Wilkie Collins had coined the term “the unknown public” for penny fiction’s audience, said Payn, it had grown many-fold—archly noting as well that while their discrimination and taste had not increased along with it, penny fiction now “commanded the services of our most eminent novel writers.” His own opinion of it was low—not because it resorted to sensation, but almost because it didn’t, or not enough for him, anyway. His Nineteenth Century article seemed to describe not shilling-shockers, but romance fiction, and of the blandest sort: “crude and ineffective in their pictures of domestic life”—“deficient in dramatic incident”—“vapid,” “dull”—“indeed, the total absence of humour, and even of the least attempt at it, is most remarkable.”

“And yet it attracts, it is calculated, four millions of readers,” marveled Payn: “a fact which makes my mouth water like that of Tantalus.” For aspiring-writer A. Conan Doyle, this may have been a good marketing tip, even though Payn recommended penny fiction for “that respectable class who have a horror of ‘sensation,’” and Conan Doyle had an undeniable weakness for the latter. In June 1883, for example, settled in Southsea now, he told his mother, in the same paragraph mentioning Payn as an literary exemplar (no less than in Southsea now, he told his mother, in latter. In June 1882, for example, settled 1882, Doyle had an undeniable weakness for the penny fiction, and of the blandest sort: “crude and ineffective in their pictures of domestic life”—“deficient in dramatic incident”—“vapid,” “dull”—“indeed, the total absence of humour, and even of the least attempt at it, is most remarkable.”

“...but who, along with him, were discovering that they were in fact ‘nothing of the kind.’” And the majority of penny fiction’s fans, he concluded dolefully, were female domestic servants.

Two years later, however, in February 1885, Thomas Wright, the author of studies of London’s poor and working-classes (e.g., The Great Unwashed, 1868), contradicted Payn “Concerning the Unknown Public.” Wright (estimating penny fiction’s audience not at four millions, but five) denied the female domestic servant canard:

The bulk of this great body of readers comes from classes that, in their own estimation at any rate, are several ‘cuts’ above the domestic class. They belong to the ‘young lady’ classes—

of Literature

bankruptcy.” This may even have been one example of penny fiction he’d taken for a thriller because of “a Private Inquiry Office, with a detective in it.” Yet when Payn had the chance five years later to publish Conan Doyle’s detective tale, he sent it back. “Verily,” muttered Conan Doyle, “literature is a difficult oyster to open.” Perhaps Payn was happy to read shilling dreadfuls, but not to be seen publishing them. His editorial work, he’d implied in Nineteenth Century, was for:

Penny fiction’s products, he declared, “cater not for the domestic-servant class, but for the lower, middle, or let-us-be genteel-or-die classes.” Nor did readers of penny fiction read that alone, but better literature as well, he insisted; particularly given the spread of public education since the 1870 Act creating England’s board schools—the “beacons of the future” extolled by Sherlock Holmes in “The Naval Treaty.”

Conan Doyle would have loved to see A Study in Scarlet serialized in The Cornhill, or published by Smith, Elder, but after several more rejections, he resigned himself to the shilling-shocker’s fate: “As Ward, Lock & Co. made a specialty of cheap and often sensational literature, I sent it to them,” he wrote in Memories and Adventures. For most aesthetes and highbrow critics, of course, Sherlock Holmes would always be shilling dreadfuls (if eventually priced too high to be penny fiction). In 1896, when Conan Doyle had quite a range of work to his credit, he along with several other popular writers were savaged by Henry Harland, editor of the avant-garde Yellow Book, as “the very Dogs of Bookland,” charged with “violation of the decencies of art, low truckling to the tastes of the purchaser, commonness, vulgarity, total lack of suppleness and distinction.” All that Conan Doyle had produced, alleged the self-described “Yellow Dwarf,” was “a litter of assorted Mongrels, going cheap—regardez moi leurs pattes!” And while other critics of the day might be less caustic, like Arthur William A Beckett in his essay “Sir Arthur Conan Doyle” in May 1904’s English Illustrated Magazine, there was often still a touch of smug condescension in comments like: “Although equal to work of all kinds, Conan Doyle is best known to the multitude as the author whose books are the highest in popularity in the reading room of Scotland Yard.”

Thomas Wright in 1883 had known better. In his Nineteenth Century article he had prophesied progress in taste that James Payn had not foreseen in his article on the same subject. “The demand for and appreciation of a better class of fiction than is at present furnished to them by their serials already exists among the unknown public, and is steadily increasing,” Wright claimed. As far as we’re concerned, and we daresay our own readers as well, this would come less than ten years later, in 1891, with the launch of The Strand Magazine, where

6. “I have half a mind to try Blackwoods again” for it, he continued, but settled instead for the far less lofty Bow Bells, self-described “magazine of literature and art, for family reading.”
7. Discriminating there, which Payn had not, between penny, two-penny, and three-penny fiction.
Sherlock Holmes in short-story form would grip “known” and “unknown” reading publics alike.

IV

But that spoke to the 1880s-90s writing market, for people like A. Conan Doyle. What we wondered about most, after discovering Barclay’s Mormons article, and Francis’s related one about the American West, were others that may have informed A Study in Scarlet. And there were, we found, other possibilities in the early/mid 1880s Nineteenth Century.

For Conan Doyle was not very familiar with London in 1886 when he wrote his first Sherlock Holmes tale. He had not lived there so far, and his principal exposures to it had been brief youthful visits to his Doyle relatives who lived principally in quite respectable Maid Vale. The first was in 1874, when he was fifteen years old, and the second in 1878 when he was in medical school. He saw many popular sights on those occasions, but not London’s seamy side, unless one counts the Chamber of Horrors at Mme. Tussaud’s wax museum, visited by him at the impressionable age of fifteen when it was in Baker Street.

For would-be novelists needing to describe early-1880s London, some possibilities of interest in Nineteenth Century were:

- March 1883, “Our Hospitals” by Henry C. Burdett, including St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, where Watson meets Holmes in A Study in Scarlet. Bart’s was a very crowded and busy place, we learn from Burdett who, though later knighted for philanthropic work as a financier, had direct experience of hospitals in Birmingham and in London, where he’d studied medicine at Guy’s Hospital.

- August 1882, “Home of the Poor in London,” by Richard Asheton Cross, a previous and future Home Secretary. His concern was how public health was menaced by the way huge numbers of London’s populace were forced to live. “There are houses, courts, and alleys, within certain well-known and well-defined areas, which are unfit for human habitation,” he wrote, where a prevalence of ill health could be attributed:

  - to the closeness, narrowness, and bad arrangement or bad condition of the streets and houses, or groups of houses, within such areas, and to

  the want of light, air, ventilation, or proper conveniences, and to other sanitary defects. These courts and alleys are built close together, have often very small, and almost as often no yards. They are frequently approached by a narrow passage, it may be from thirty to forty feet long and only some three feet broad, under a house at either end, and in many cases without any thoroughfare at all.

While Cross was under no illusions about the character of districts like Whitechapel, he realized that in others were “respectable and hard-working of the labouring class living there against their will, but compelled to live there because they can find no other place wherein to live.” So it should not surprise us to find that Conan Doyle had the lowly Police Constable John Rance’s home reached by Holmes’ cab “threading its way through a long succession of dingy streets and dreary byways.”

In the dingiest and dreariest of them our driver suddenly came to a stand. “That’s Audley Court in there,” he said, pointing to a narrow slit in the line of dead-coloured brick... The narrow passage led us into a quadrangle paved with flags and lined by sordid dwellings. We picked our way among groups of dirty children and through lines of discoloured linen, until we came to Number 46, the door of which was decorated with a small slip of brass on which the name of Rance was engraved.

Or that No. 3, Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road, where a prevalence of ill health could be attributed:

were an ill-omened and minatory look. It was one of four which stood back some little way from the street, two being occupied and two empty. The latter looked out with three tiers of vacant melancholy windows, two being occupied and two empty. The former window was blank and dreary, save that here and there a ‘To Let’ card had developed like a cataract upon the leeréd panes. A small garden sprinkled over with a scattered eruption of sickly plants separated each of these houses from the street, and was traversed by a narrow pathway, yellowish in colour, and consisting apparently of a mixture of clay and of gravel. The whole place was very sloppy from the rain which had fallen through the night.

These examples and others we can cite would be as nothing did we not know that Conan Doyle was reading Nineteenth Century in the 1880s. So we turn to the article “Detective Police” in May 1883’s issue. “There can hardly be a doubt but that certain recent events, both in England and Ireland,” it began, “should teach us that we ought in this country to take a new departure as regards the detection of crime,” continuing:

it is a curious fact that as regards a detective force we are very little if at all better off than our grandparents were half a century ago, when they had to reply upon Townsend, the famous Bow Street runner, as the only man in England who could hunt out thieves or murderers, and bring them to justice.

The Saturday Review
The writer, Malcolm Ronald Laing Meason, was born in Edinburgh in 1824 (says *Men and Women of the Time: a Dictionary of Contemporaries*, 1899); educated in France and England; served as an army officer until 1851 (and in the First Afghan War, 1841-42); and thereafter worked as a journalist in India, Paris, and England.

(Meason also wrote for *Colburn’s United Service Magazine*, e.g., “Besieged in Candahar,” July 1882. We started wondering—Portsmouth being an important naval and military base, and Southsea an officers’ retirement community—if Conan Doyle read *Colburn’s* as well. During 1882-83, it ran an unsigned “Recollections of an Army Surgeon” series, and also a fiction serial called *Captain Kinks*. In May 1883’s installment, Kinks meets a young woman: “She was good-looking, had finely-formed features, and a face, softer, and more pointed toward its lower part than is common with English women. To evident health her appearance added the grace that certainly betokens good, and gentle education.” And the first words out of her mouth? “My name is Morsten.” As Dr. Gray Chandler Briggs once remarked, there’s something positively spooky about Conan Doyle.)

Meason’s “Detective Police” went on to explore the lamentable differences between the uniformed British police’s efficiency at maintaining public order, and its plainclothes detective force’s pathetic inability to solve crimes:

“When once a crime is committed in London, when once the thieves get fairly off with the property they have taken, or if the unknown murderer manages to keep out of the way for a few hours after he has killed his victim, the detection of crime seems to be a problem which our so-called detectives have not the capacity in most cases to solve.

He contrasted England’s approach unfavorably to France’s very different one, giving examples of it from the several years he’d lived in Paris, which stressed the French detective corps’ avoidance of publicity, exploitation of informers, skilful use of disguises, and clandestine penetration of the French underworld.9

But more than such techniques was required, he insisted: deeper knowledge of crime, and the application of science. “In France,” he said (emphasis in the original), “the art—for it certainly merits being so

9. Meason had previously published an article about “The French Detective Police” in February 1881’s *Macmillan’s Magazine*.
detective stories, greatly admired by Conan Doyle, nor the practical example in observation and deduction afforded by Dr. Joseph Bell when Conan Doyle was a medical student. But if young Dr. Conan Doyle needed convincing that the official force's Lestrades and Gregsons weren't up to snuff, this article was surely the goods. And here, in a single article of a magazine he read avidly, were themes implicit in the Sherlock Holmes tales he would write: no more crime not immediately apprehended by the untrained eye, he wrote, in tones Sherlock Holmes himself might have used in his own magazine article “The Book of Life,” in chapter two of A Study in Scarlet, such graduates in the University of Nature will divine, not only the fact that a party has passed that way, but its strength, its composition, the course it took, and the number of hours or days which have elapsed since it passed. But they are able to do this because, like Zadig, they perceive endless minute differences where untrained eyes discern nothing; and because the unconscious logic of common sense compels them to account for these effects by the causes they know to be competent to produce them.  

But we particularly heard the sound of sleigh bells when we saw in August 1884’s issue “A Tangled Skein Unravelled,” its author analyzing various authorship theories in order to solve “the Mystery of Shakespeare’s Sonnets.” In 1886, A Tangled Skein was what Conan Doyle originally intended to call his first Sherlock Holmes tale. Of course, the phrase was coined neither by him nor the article’s author, Charles Mackay, a Scottish writer and father of the late-Victorian bestselling writer Marie Corelli, whose first novel appeared in 1886; the OED cites 1797 as its first instance in print.

By this point, though, Conan Doyle had been believing that it was The Nineteenth Century where “The Book of Life” appeared, Holmes’s unsigned article Watson dismissed as ineffable twaddle before realizing his new flat-mate was its author. It was exactly the sort of article Nineteenth Century liked to publish, and Conan Doyle would have seen it there.

VI

Students of Conan Doyle, now knowing how important The Nineteenth Century was for him as reading matter in the 1880s, will find other material in it that may have informed other early work of his as well. He wrote supernatural tales: in Nineteenth Century were “Apparitions” by the Society for Psychical Research’s Edmund Gurney & Frederic W. H. Myers, May 1884, and in April 1885, “The Comparative Study of Ghost Stories” by another editorial hero of Conan Doyle’s, Andrew Lang. Conan Doyle became a strong proponent of a Channel tunnel: February 1882 had Admiral Lord Dunsmay’s “The Proposed Channel Tunnel,” followed in consecutive issues by commentaries pro and con by others. Conan Doyle turned to historical fiction later in the 1880s, beginning with Micah Clarke, and by the decade’s end The White Company, which opens with the bells of Beaulieu Abbey ringing: July 1883 had “The Coming of the Friars” by Augustus Jessopp, January 1884’s issue the same writer’s “Daily Life in a Medieval Monastery.” 

(And while it didn’t come until December 1889, after he’d finished writing The Sign of the Four, we smiled to see “In Praise of London Fog,” by M. H. Dzierzicki.)

Nor do these exhaust the list of possibilities in the 1880s, let alone 19th issues we haven’t examined. How long Conan Doyle faithfully read The Nineteenth Century we can’t say. He didn’t write it for another until March 1901 (the year it renamed itself The Nineteenth Century and After): “Sham versus Real Home Defence,” replying to one the previous month by Colonel Lonsdale Hale, a War Office critic of Conan Doyle’s military reform ideas. The magazine ran beyond Conan Doyle’s lifetime, renaming itself once again (The Twentieth Century) in 1951, before coming to an end in our own era, in 1972.

But we do know Conan Doyle read it avidly in the 1880s; and two more articles prior to A Study in Scarlet strike a Holmesian chord. First, commentators as far back as 1907, in Julian Hawthorne’s notes for Library of the World’s Best Mystery and Detective Stories, have marked the similarities between the deductive reasoning of Voltaire’s Zadig and of Sherlock Holmes. Eye-catching, then, in June 1880’s Nineteenth Century, is “On the Method of Zadig,” by the great scientist T. H. Huxley, known as Darwin’s Bulldog, whom Conan Doyle in Memories and Adventures called one of the “pilots” of his early years. Sub-titled “Retrospective Prophecy as a Function of Science,” Huxley described how Voltaire’s Babylonian-philosopher character used uncommon powers of observation and deduction to astound and mystify those around him, in order to demonstrate how this reasoning process should be employed in investigative science by Huxley’s contemporaries. “From freshly broken twigs, crushed leaves, disturbed pebbles, and imprints hardly discernible

enthusiastic pages of reasons why, ending: “I end as I began. Forget your prejudices against historical fiction, and read Micah Clarke.” The same month, at J. M. Stoddard’s historic Langham Hotel dinner at which Conan Doyle was commissioned to write a second Sherlock Holmes novel, the still-obscure young author was delighted to find that his famous table-mate Oscar Wilde had read Micah Clarke. He agreed to write the tale which became The Sign of the Four for Stoddard, but his heart was with the new historical novel he had been writing, The White Company. 

12. One U. of N. graduate discussed at length by Huxley was the French scientist Georges Cuvier, whom Holmes praises similarly in “The Five Orange Pips.”

The Saturday Review