

# SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

## tells of HIS WORK & CAREER

by  
Bram Stoker



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in campaigning kit.  
[London Stereoscopic Company.]



BACK VIEW  
SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S HOUSE



LADY CONAN DOYLE.



in his Study.

[Campbell Gray.]

them in his own words in the sequence of a direct narrative. After all, there is nothing like a man's "ipsissima verba" to show the reality of the individual through the mistiness of words. I omit questions except where necessary, and only venture to add comment or description where such may add to the reader's enlightenment.

"My people on the father's side," said the creator of "Sherlock Holmes," "were all artists of a peculiarly imaginative type. My father, Charles Doyle, was, in truth, a great unrecognised genius. He drifted to Edinburgh from London in his early youth, and so he lost the chance of living before the public eye. His wild and strange fancies alarmed, I think, rather than pleased the stolid Scotchmen of the 50's and 60's. His mind ran on strange moonlight effects, done with extraordinary skill in water colours; dancing witches, crowning esamen, death coaches on lonely moors at night, and goblins chasing children across churchyards."

All these pictures were in the room, or in some of those adjacent. With them were a lot of others, delicate fancies and weird flights of imagination. There was one tiny picture of a little fairy carrying a branch and leading a beetle by a string, which was daintily sweet.

"I have myself no turn for this form of art at all beyond a very keen colour sense which makes a discord of shades perfectly painful to my eye. I suppose, however, that there is a metabolism in these things, and that any sense I have for dramatic effect corresponds, or is an equivalent, in some degree, to the artistic nature of my father, whom, by the way, I in no degree resemble physically. But my real love for letters, my instinct for story-telling, springs, I believe, from my mother, who is of Anglo-Celtic stock, with the glamour and romance of the Celt very strongly marked. Her I do resemble physically, and also in character, so that I take my leanings towards romance rather from her side than my father's. In my early childhood, as far back as I can remember anything at all, the vivid stories which she would tell me stand out so clearly that they obscure the real facts of my life. It is not only that she was—a still—a wonderful story-teller, but she had, I remember, an art of sinking her voice to a hoarse-stricken whisper when she came to a crisis in her narrative, which makes me goose-fleshy now when I think of it. I am sure, looking back, that it was in attempting to expulate these stories of my childhood that I first began weaving dreams myself.

"When I was six I wrote a book of adventure—doubtless my mother has it yet. I illustrated it myself. It must be an absurd production, but still it showed the set of my mind. When I went to school I carried the characteristic with me. There I was in some demand as a story-teller. I could start a hero off from home and carry him through an interminable succession of wayside happenings which would, if necessary, last through the spare hours of a whole term. This faculty remained with me all my school days, and the only scholastic success I can ever remember lay in the direction of English essays and poetry. I was no good at either classics or mathematics; even my English I wrote as pleasure, not as work.

"After leaving Stonyhurst I was sent to a 'finishing' school in Germany, the Tyrol. There again my tendency to letters asserted itself. I started and edited a school magazine. Although the German acquired was indifferent, I think I had great benefit from the small but select English library. Macaulay and Scott, I remember, were my favourite authors. But I was and am still an omnivorous reader, with very catholic sympathies. There is hardly anything which does not interest me. Indeed, it would be difficult to name any form of true literature which does not give me intense pleasure.

"In 1876 I drifted into the study of medicine. The reason largely was that my people lived in Edinburgh—he pronounces the word in Scotch fashion, "Edinboro"—and there is a famous medical school there. For four years I went through the curriculum. My people were not at that time wealthy, and it was a struggle to keep me at college. So I compressed my classes into the winter, and devoted each summer to serving as a medical assistant, and so earning a little money to help to pay the fees. I served in this way in Sheffield, in the country districts of Shropshire, and finally in Birmingham—a billet to which I returned three times. The practice lay mostly in the slums of that great city, and I certainly saw a large variety of character and of life, such as I could hardly have known so intimately in any other way.

"The one trouble to me in this arrangement of my life was that I had no means of gratifying the love of athletics which was very strong within me. I used to box a good deal, for that consumed little time; but my cricket and football were neglected. I can say, however, that I have played for my university in both cricket and Rugby football. I had then no time or chance of being a constant player; I feel justified, therefore, in taking it out at the other end. I played a heavy match at football when I was 42 years of age, and I still, at the age of 43, play cricket twice a week. So I claim now the debts which were not paid me in my youth.

"When I was nearly 22 a friend of mine who had been surgeon to a whaler in the Arctic seas told me that he was unable to return that summer, and offered me the billet. I was away for seven months in the Greenland ocean. I came of age in eighty degrees north latitude.

"This was a delightful period of my life. There are eight boats to a whaler, and the eighth, which is kept as a sort of emergency boat, is manned by the so-called 'idlers' of the ship. These consisted, in this case, of myself, the steward, the second engineer, and an old seaman. But it happened that, with the exception of the veteran, we were all young and strong and keen; and I think our boat was as good as any."

As he spoke he could not fail to remember the harpoons hanging on the staircase wall. They seemed to account for this enthusiasm. He went on:—

"One of the truest compliments I ever had paid me in my life was when the captain offered to make me the harpooner as well as surgeon if I would come for another year. When you think that a whale was then worth some £2,000, and that hit or miss depends on the nerve of the harpooner, I am proud to think that the skipper, old John Grey, should have offered me such a post.

"On returning home from the Arctic I took my degree, having been thrown back one year by the fact of going North. I was 22 when I qualified and, thanks to my numerous assistantships, had a very varied experience behind me.

"Almost immediately afterward I was offered the post of surgeon on a steamer going down the west coast of Africa. I was again most fortunate in my captain, and the voyage was a delightful one. We were away four months, and the pleasure of my experience was only marred by my getting the rather virulent fever which prevails on that coast. Two of us got it, and the other man died, so that I suppose I may call myself lucky.

"On my return to England I settled in practice, first in Plymouth and then, after a few months, at Southsea, the fashionable suburb of Portsmouth. My adventures in that rather romantic

period, and all my mental and spiritual aspirations, are written down in 'The Stark Munro Letters,' a book which, with the exception of one chapter, is a very close autobiography.

"In this period my literary tendencies had slowly developed. During the years of my studentship my life was so full of work that, though I read a great deal, I had little time to cultivate writing. After starting in practice, however, I had much—too much—time on my hands; and then I began to write voluminously.

"For ten years I wrote short stories; roughly, from 1877 to 1887. During that time I do not think that I ever earned £50 in any year by my pen, though I worked incessantly. Nearly all

the magazines published the stories anonymously—a most iniquitous fashion, by which all chance of promotion is barred to young writers. The best of these stories have since been published in the volume called 'The Captain of the Pole Star!' Sometimes I saw my stories praised by critics, but the criticism never came to my address. The 'Cornhill Magazine,' 'Temple Bar,' and 'London Society' were the chief magazines in which my stories appeared.

"Finally in 1887 I wrote 'A Study in Scarlet,' the first book which introduced Sherlock Holmes. I don't know how I got that name. I was looking the other day at a bit of paper on which I had scribbled 'Sherringford Holmes' and 'Sherrington Hope,' and all sorts of other combinations. Finally at the bottom of the paper I had written 'Sherlock Holmes.' 'A Study in Scarlet' appeared in a Christmas number of Beeton's Annual. The book had no particular success at the time, though many people have been good enough to read it since.

"My next book was 'Micah Clarke,' a historical novel. This met with a good reception from the critics and the public, and from that time onward I had no further difficulty in disposing of my manuscripts. When two years later I wrote 'The White Company' I felt that my position was strong enough to enable me to give up practice. I still cling to my profession, for I came to London and started as an oculist. After six months, however, this also seemed unnecessary, and I finally retired. I have not indulged in my profession since, except when I went campaigning."

That he did good service in that noble profession in the South African war is attested not only by his book on the record of the Langman Hospital, but by a noble silver bowl which stands at a corner of his house in Hindhead, on which is inscribed:—

"To Arthur Conan Doyle, who at a great crisis—in word and deed—served his country."

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"MY first book! That was written when I was six years of age! But if I am to tell you about myself, I suppose I had better begin at the beginning.

The speaker was lying on a chintz covered sofa in the pretty drawing-room of his house at Hindhead, down in Surrey. The forenoon sun was streaming in through one of the mullioned windows, of which the bars were softened by the delicate fringe of green of the creepers which spread all along them. The whole room was full of soft light, which showed the fine old furniture and the multitude of dainty knick-knacks to perfection. Even the many quaint and pretty pictures seemed to stand out from the walls.

Conan Doyle built his house Undershaw in the western angle at the joining of the road from Haslemere with the Portsmouth road, just below the very top of the hill. It stands on a little platform lying below the road. As north and east of it is a thick grove of trees and shrubs, it is completely sheltered from stranger eyes except from down the valley.

The "interview" which followed was the result of many questions. The subject of it was most kind and amenable, thoroughly understanding everything and willing to enlighten me as I required. But he is not naturally a pushing man or an egotist, and it was necessary to keep him resolutely to the point of his own identity. I say this as his various statements were so lucid and illuminative that I think it better to give

