

A Day with Dr. Conan Doyle.

BY HARRY HOW.



From a Photo, by

DR. CONAN DOYLE AND MRS. CONAN DOYLE.

[Elliott & Fry.]

DETEECTIVISM up to date—that is what Dr. Conan Doyle has given us. We were fast becoming weary of the representative of the old school; he was, at his best, a very ordinary mortal, and, with the palpable clues placed in his path, the average individual could have easily cornered the “wanted” one without calling in the police or the private inquiry agent. Sher-

lock Holmes entered the criminal arena. He started on the track. A clever fellow; a cool, calculating fellow, this Holmes. He could see the clue to a murder in a ball of worsted, and certain conviction in a saucer of milk. The little things we regarded as nothings were all and everything to Holmes. He was an artful fellow, too; and though he knew “all about it” from the first, he ingeniously contrived to hold his secret until we got to the very last line in

the story. There never was a man who propounded a criminal conundrum and gave us so many guesses until we "gave it up" as Sherlock Holmes.

I thought of all this as I was on my way to a prettily-built and modest-looking red-brick residence in the neighbourhood of South Norwood. Here lives Dr. Conan Doyle. I found him totally different from the man I expected to see; but that is always the case. There was nothing lynx-eyed, nothing "detective" about him—not even the regulation walk

of our modern solver of mysteries. He is just a happy, genial, homely man; tall, broad-shouldered, with a hand that grips you heartily, and, in its sincerity of welcome, hurts. He is brown and bronzed, for he enters liberally into all outdoor sports—football, tennis, bowls, and cricket. His average with the bat this season is twenty. He is a capital amateur photographer, too. But in exercise he most leans towards tricycling. He is never happier than when on his tandem with his wife, and starting on a thirty-mile spin; never merrier than when he perches his little three-year-old Mary on the wheels, and runs her round the green lawn of his garden.

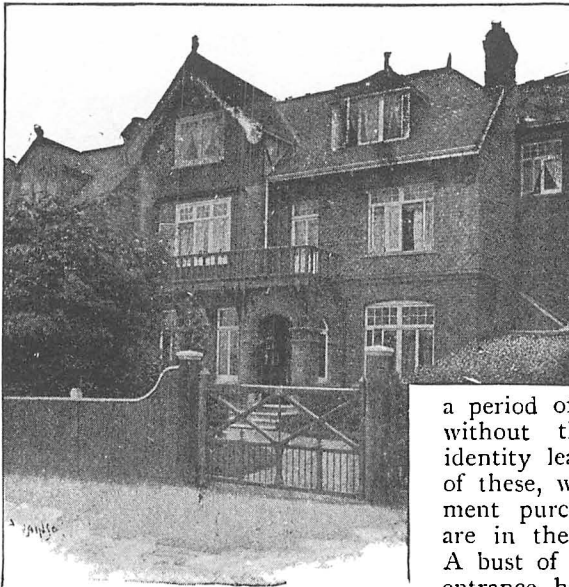
Dr. Doyle and

I, accompanied by his wife, a most charming woman, went through the rooms as a

preliminary. The study is a quiet corner, and has on its walls many remarkable pictures by Dr. Doyle's father. Dr. Doyle comes of a family of artists. His grandfather, John Doyle, was the celebrated "H. B.," whose pictorial political skits came out for

a period of over thirty years without the secret of his identity leaking out. A few of these, which the Government purchased for £1,000, are in the British Museum. A bust of the artist is in the entrance hall. John Doyle's sons were all artists. "Dicky Doyle," as he was known to

his familiars, designed the cover of *Punch*. His signature "D.," with a little bird on top, is in the corner. On the mantelpiece of the study, near to an autograph portrait of J. M. Barrie, is a remarkably interesting sketch, reproduced in these pages. It was done by John Doyle, and represented the



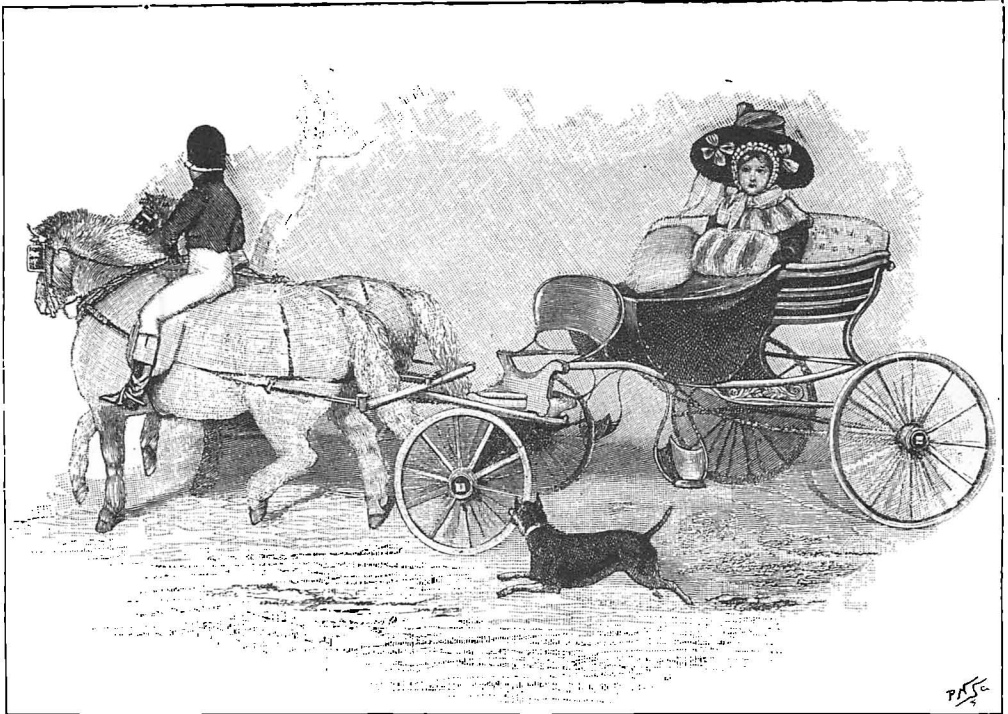
DR. CONAN DOYLE'S HOUSE.
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.



From a Photo. by]

THE STUDY.

[Elliott & Fry.]



From a Sketch

QUEEN VICTORIA AT THE AGE OF SIX.

[by John Doyle.

Queen at the age of six driving in Hyde Park. The story is told how the little princess caught sight of old John Doyle trying to get a sketch of her, and graciously commanded her chaise to stop, so that it might be done.

The dining-room contains some good oil paintings by Mrs. Doyle's brother. On the top of a large book-case are a number of Arctic trophies, brought by the owner of the house from a region where the climate is even chillier than our own. The drawing-room is a pretty little apartment. The chairs are cosy, the afternoon tea refreshing, and the thin bread and butter delicious. You may notice a portrait of the English team of cricketers who

went out to Holland last year. Dr. Doyle is among them. Here are many more pictures by his father.

"That plaque in the corner?" said Dr. Doyle, taking down a large blue-and-white plate. "It was one of the late Khedive's dinner plates. When I was leaving Portsmouth, an old patient came to bid me



From a Photo, by

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

[Elliott & Fry.



THE KHEDIVE'S PLATE.
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.

good-bye. She brought this as a little something to remember her by. Her son was a young able-bodied seaman on the *Inflexible* at the bombardment of Alexandria. A shot made a hole in the Khedive's palace, and when the lad landed he found it out, and crawled through. He found himself in the Khedive's kitchen! With an eye to loot, he seized this plate, and crawled out again. It was the most treasured thing the old lady possessed, she said, and she begged me to take it. I thought much of the action."

We lighted our cigars, and settled down again in the study.

Dr. Doyle was born in Edinburgh in 1859. He went to Stonyhurst in Lancashire at nine, and there had a school magazine which he edited and in which he

wrote the poetry. He remained here seven years, when he went to Germany. There were a few English boys at this particular school, and a second magazine made its appearance. But its opinions were too outspoken; its motto was, "Fear not, and put it in print." As a matter of fact, a small leading article appeared on the injustice of reading the boys' letters before they were given into their hands. The words used were very strong, and a court-martial was held on the proprietors of the organ, and its further publication prohibited. At seventeen Dr. Doyle went to Edinburgh, and began to study medicine. At nineteen he sent his first real attempt—a story entitled, "The Mystery of the Sassassa Valley," to *Chambers's Journal*, for which he received three guineas.

"I remained a student until one-and-twenty," said Dr. Doyle, "medicine in the day, sometimes a little writing at night. Just at this time an opportunity occurred

for me to go to the Arctic Seas in a whaler. I determined to go, putting off passing my exams. for a year. What a climate it is in those regions! We don't understand it here. I don't mean its coldness—I refer to its sanitary properties. I believe, in years to come, it will be the world's sanatorium. Here, thousands of miles from the smoke, where the air is the finest in the world, the invalid and weakly ones will go when all other places have failed to give them the air



From a Photo. by] MRS. CONAN DOYLE AND DAUGHTER. [Dr. Conan Doyle.

they want, and revive and live again under the marvellous invigorating properties of the Arctic atmosphere.

"What with whaling, shooting, and boxing—for I took a couple of pairs of gloves with me, and used to box with the steward in the stokehole at night—we had a good time. On my return, I went back to medicine in Edinburgh again. There I met the man who suggested Sherlock Holmes to me—here is a portrait of him as he was in those days, and he is strong and hearty, and still in Edinburgh now."

I looked at the portrait. It represented the features of Mr. Joseph Bell, M.D., whose name I had heard mentioned whilst with Professor Blackie a few months ago in the Scotch capital.

"I was clerk in Mr. Bell's ward," continued Dr. Doyle. "A clerk's duties are to note down all the patients to be seen, and muster them together. Often I would have seventy or eighty. When everything was ready, I would show them in to Mr. Bell, who would have the students gathered round him. His intuitive powers were simply marvellous. Case No. 1 would step up.

"I see," said Mr. Bell, 'you're suffering from drink. You even carry a flask in the inside breast pocket of your coat.'

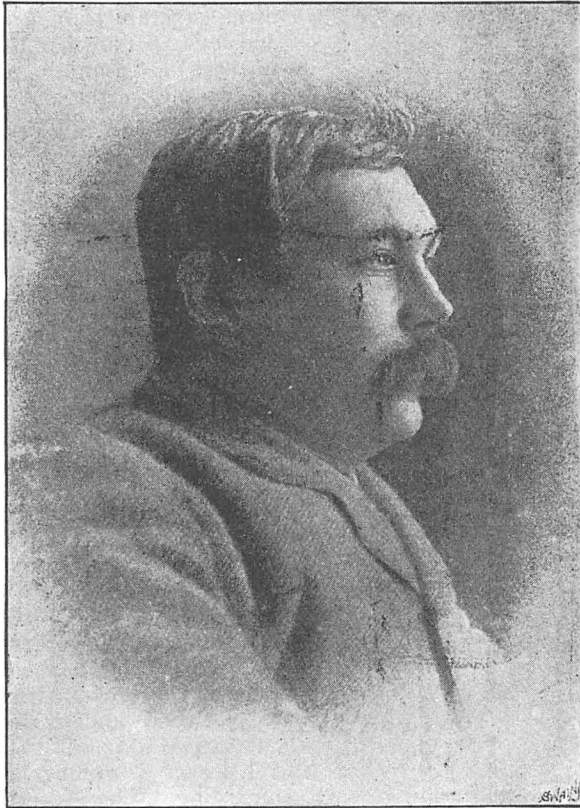
"Another case would come forward.

"'Cobbler, I see.' Then he would turn to the students, and point out to them that the inside of the knee of the man's trousers was worn. That was where the man had rested the lapstone—a peculiarity only found in cobblers.

"All this impressed me very much. He was continually before me—his sharp, piercing grey eyes, eagle nose, and striking

features. There he would sit in his chair with fingers together—he was very dexterous with his hands—and just look at the man or woman before him. He was most kind and painstaking with the students—a real good friend—and when I took my degree and went to Africa the remarkable individuality and discriminating tact of my old master made a deep and lasting impression on me, though I had not the faintest idea that it would one day lead me to forsake medicine for story writing."

It was in 1882 that Dr. Doyle started practising in Southsea, where he continued for eight years. By degrees literature took his attention from the preparation of prescriptions. In his spare time he wrote some fifty or sixty stories for many of the best magazines, during these eight years before his name became really known. A small selection of these tales has been published since, under the title of "The Captain of the Polestar," and has passed through some four editions. He was by no means forgetting the opportuni-



From a Photo. by]

DR. CONAN DOYLE.

[Elliott & Fry.

ties offered to such a truly inventive mind as his in novel writing. Once again the memory of his old master came back to him. He wrote "A Study in Scarlet," which was refused by many, but eventually sold outright by its author for £25. Then came "Micah Clarke"—a story dealing with the Monmouth Rebellion. This was remarkably successful. "The Sign of Four" came next, and the publication of this enhanced the reputation of its author very considerably. Sherlock Holmes was making his problems distinctly

agreeable to the public, which soon began to evince an intense interest in them, and expectantly watched and waited for every new mystery which the famous detective undertook to solve. But Holmes—so to speak—was put back for a time.

"I determined," said Dr. Doyle, "to test my own powers to the utmost. You must

As to my companion neither the country nor the sea presented the slightest attraction to him. He loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime.

SPECIMEN OF THE MS. OF "THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES."

remember that I was still following medicine. Novel writing was in a great measure a congenial pastime, a pastime that I felt would inevitably become converted into a profession. I devoted two years to the study of fourteenth-century life in England—Edward III.'s reign—when the country was at its height. The period has hardly been treated in fiction at all, and I had to

go back to early authorities for everything. I set myself to reconstruct the archer, who has always seemed to me to be the most striking figure in English history. Of course, Scott has done him finely and inimitably in his outlaw aspect. But it was not as an outlaw that he was famous. He was primarily a soldier, one of the finest that the world has ever seen—rough, hard-drinking, hard-swearing, but full of pluck and animal spirits. The archers must have been extraordinary fellows. The French, who have always been gallant soldiers, gave up trying to fight them at last, and used to allow English armies to wander unchecked through the country. It was the same in Spain and in Scotland. Then the knights, I think, were much more human-kind of people than they have usually been depicted. Strength had little to do with their knightly qualities. Some of the most famous of them were very weak men, physically. Chandos was looked upon as the first knight in Europe when he was over eighty. My study of the period ended in my writing, 'The White Company,' which has, I believe, gone through a fair number of editions already.

"I made up my mind to abandon my practice at Southsea, come to London, and start as an eye specialist—a branch of the profession of which I was peculiarly fond. I studied at Paris and Vienna, and, whilst in the latter city, wrote 'The Doings of Raffle Haws.' On my return to London I took rooms in Wimpole-street, had a brass plate put on the door, and started. But orders for stories began to come in, and at the expiration of three months I forsook medicine altogether, came to Norwood, and started writing for THE STRAND MAGAZINE."

I learnt a number of interesting facts regarding "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes." Dr. Doyle invariably conceives the end of his story first, and writes up to it. He gets the climax, and his art lies in the ingenious way in which he conceals it from his readers. A story—similar to those which have appeared in these pages—occupies about a week in writing, and the ideas have come at all manner of times—when out walking, cricketing, tricycling, or playing tennis. He works between the hours of breakfast and lunch, and again in the evening from five to eight, writing some three thousand words a day. He receives many suggestions from the public. On the morning of my visit the particulars of a poisoning case

had been sent to him from New Zealand, and the previous day a great packet of documents relating to a disputed will had been received from Bristol. But the suggestions are seldom practicable. Other letters come from people who have been reading the latest of his stories, saying whether they guessed the mystery or not. His reason for refraining from writing any more stories for a while is a candid one. He is fearful of spoiling a character of which he is particularly fond, but he declares that already he has enough material to carry him through another series, and merrily assures me that he thought the opening story of the next series of "Sherlock Holmes," to be published in this magazine, was of such an unsolvable character, that he had positively bet his wife a shilling that she would not guess the true solution of it until she got to the end of the chapter!

After my visit to Dr. Doyle, I communicated with Mr. Joseph Bell, in Edinburgh—the gentleman whose ingenious personality suggested Sherlock Holmes to his old pupil. The letter he sent in reply is of such interest that it is appended in its entirety:—

2, Melville-crescent,
Edinburgh, June 16, 1892.

Dear Sir,—You ask me about the kind of teaching to which Dr. Conan Doyle has so kindly referred, when speaking of his ideal character, "Sherlock Holmes." Dr. Conan Doyle has, by his imaginative genius, made a great deal out of very little, and his warm remembrance of one of his old teachers has coloured the picture. In teaching the treatment of disease and accident, all careful teachers have first to show the student how to recognise accurately the case. The recognition depends in great measure on the accurate and rapid appreciation of

small points in which the diseased differs from the healthy state. In fact, the student must be taught to observe. To interest him in this kind of work we teachers find it useful to show the student how much a trained use of the observation can discover in ordinary matters such as the previous history, nationality, and occupation of a patient.

The patient, too, is likely to be impressed by your ability to cure him in the future if he sees you, at a glance, know much of his past. And the whole trick is much easier than it appears at first.

For instance, physiognomy helps you to nationality, accent to district, and, to an educated ear, almost to county. Nearly every handicraft writes its sign manual on the hands. The scars of the miner differ from those of the quarryman. The carpenter's callosities are not those of the mason. The shoemaker and the tailor are quite different.

The soldier and the sailor differ in gait, though last month I had to tell a man who said he was a soldier that he had been a sailor in his boyhood. The subject is endless: the tattoo marks on hand or arm will tell their own tale as to voyages; the ornaments on the watch chain of the success-

ful settler will tell you where he made his money. A New Zealand squatter will not wear a gold mohur, nor an engineer on an Indian railway a Maori stone. Carry the same idea of using one's senses accurately and constantly, and you will see that many a surgical case will bring his past history, national, social, and medical, into the consulting-room as he walks in. Dr. Conan Doyle's genius and intense imagination has on this slender basis made his detective stories a distinctly new departure, but he owes much less than he thinks to yours truly JOSEPH BELL.



MR. JOSEPH BELL.
From a Photo, by A. Sean Watson, Edinburgh.