

all over grown with bushes. It's a goodly passage which the Roman engineers have cut, and it intersects some of the great water worn caves, so that if you enter Blue John Gap you would do well to make your stops and to have a good store of candles or you may never make your way back to the daylight again. I have not yet gone deeply into it, but this very day I stood at the mouth of the arched tunnel and peering down into the black recesses beyond I vowed that when my health returned I would devote some holiday to exploring these mysterious depths, and finding out for myself how far the Roman had penetrated into the Derbyshire hills.

Strange how superstitious these country men are! I should have thought better of going ^{Armitage} ~~Armitage~~ for he is a man of some education and character, and a very fine fellow for his station in life. I was ^{crossed} ~~crossed~~ across the field to me

For a sharper version of this image, please visit the website of "The Terror of Blue John Gap" Project at www.acdsociety.com/bjg/a/bjga.html.

anyhow

"Afraid?" I answered "Afraid of what?"

"Of it" said he, with a jerk of his thumb towards the black vault of the terror that lives in the Blue ^{John Cave} ~~Gap~~

How absurdly easy does for a legend to arise in a ^{country} countryside. I examined him as to the reasons for his weird belief. It seems that from time to time sheep have been missing from the fields, carried bodily away according to ^{Armitage} ~~Armitage~~. That they could have wandered away of their own accord and disappeared among the mountains was an explanation to which he would not ^{listen} ~~listen~~. On one occasion a gale of blood had been found and some bits of wool that also I found out could be explained in a perfectly natural way. ^{Probably} The nights upon which sheep disappeared were invariably very dark cloudy nights with no moon. Then I met with the obvious ^{rebut} ~~rebut~~ that these are the nights which a ^{naturally} ~~naturally~~ common place sheepstealer would ^{choose} ~~choose~~ for his work. On one occasion a gap had been made in a ^{wall} ~~wall~~ fence, and some of the

DAMNING WITH FAINT PRAISE: DR. HARDCASTLE'S IMPRESSIONS OF ARMITAGE

The caustic judgment present in Dr. James Hardcastle's acerbic remarks regarding Armitage's theory about the local "Terror" requires no effort on the reader's part to, as it were, surface. Employing "superstitious" — deriving from the Latin *superstitionem* and connoting fear of the supernatural and avowed beliefs, rooted in fear or ignorance, that are considered incompatible with truth

or reason — in his very first observation about this neighbor in the Midlands delineates Hardcastle's perception of Armitage as lacking in critical and analytical skills. Moreover, Hardcastle associates Armitage's presumed deficit of scientific reasoning as an immutable characteristic of his rural context, rather than consider whether Armitage, as an ... (continued on other side)

A COMMON NEWSLETTER

— with a nod to Micah Clarke —

BRINGING TIDINGS FROM THE ACD SOCIETY

— a community dedicated to studying and enjoying the works of Arthur Conan Doyle —

via Ross Davies (editor pro tem, and publisher)

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3, NOVEMBER 2022



Two of the teams that will race in our first Wessex Cup. Silks and other accoutrements by Peggy MacFarlane.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Our big news is that we will be at Otto Penzler's The Mysterious Bookshop, 58 Warren St., in NYC on January 5, 2023, at 11:15 a.m., for two splendid events: the second annual Doylean Honors ceremony and the inaugural running of our Wessex Cup. Details here: www.acdsociety.com.

THE PAST

November brought news about Bignell Wood, ACD's huge country home in Hampshire (not to be confused with Bignell House, an even huger place in Oxfordshire). It's for sale for £2.95 million.

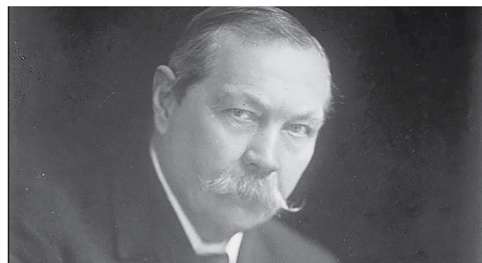
August 1929, however, brought even weightier news about Bignell Wood: Much of it had gone up in smoke in a fire that started in the thatch roof.

But ACD and his sons Denis and Adrian “dashed several times into their burning house to-day and succeeded in rescuing valuable documents and books from the flames,” according to a front page story in the August 15 *Derby Daily Telegraph*. Thank goodness! (In case of fire, save books or save house? Easy choice.)

Jermyn Street Theatre's well-reviewed adaptation of *The Poison Belt* (directed by Becca Chadder) ran July 21-30 in London.

In September, Paul Chapman and Mark Jones had Douglas Kerr (editor of Edinburgh University Press's “New Critical Editions” of ACD's works), on *Doings of Doyle* (www.doingsofdoyle.com) for a wide-ranging discussion centered on Kerr's new annotated edition of *Memories and Adventures* (a Doylean Honors winner).

In “The Times Daily Quiz” for November 9, the fifteenth question — “Who is this British writer and physician?” — was accompanied by this familiar photograph:



THE FUTURE

The Literary Agents “Ride Again” at 10:30 a.m. on January 6, 2023. Register for free at www.doingsofdoyle.com/p/the-literary-agents.html.

(continued from other side)

... established inhabitant, may actually possess more insights into the environment than a temporary visitor convalescing.

If we rely upon Hardcastle's description of Armitage as “young” during the harrowing occurrences of this tale, occurring the year before the doctor's death in February 1908, then Armitage is managing an agrarian livelihood during the post-1815 agricultural depression in Great Britain and other congruent declines in the living standard available to “his station in life.” Here, Doyle's narrator enacts his own class aspirations through an assessment of the straitened opportunities available to a member of the working class.

Doyle's narrator does not even afford Armitage the dignity of being first named before being positioned as a representative for an entire tier of society. Hardcastle makes a mordant observation about the collective “countrymen” before introducing any individual characteristics about Armitage. Through the framing device of the beleaguered Dr. Hardcastle, Doyle foregrounds a social and economic perspective associated with a mobile, salaried profession, one positioned with greater social capacity and currency than Armitage can access.

— Tamar Zeffren ©2022

Tamar's commentary continues in the annotations for manuscript page 3 at the BJK website, www.acdsociety.com/bjk/a/bjga.html. Jennifer Behrens, Bob Katz, and John Knud-Hansen also contribute new commentary. Don't miss it!

— Margie Deck and Nancy Holder

