

Who's On First, It's Not So Elementary

by
Howard Ostrom

Part I

While making up some questions for a Sherlock Holmes quiz, I included some questions like, “Who was the first actor to play Sherlock Holmes on TV?”, and “Who was the first Sherlock Holmes performer on stage?”. These questions got me interested in researching who was the first Sherlock Holmes performer in different countries, a subject I discovered was very difficult to research. The more I discussed it with Sherlockian friends from around the world, the more I discovered how very little I knew, and still yet how very little research has been done on the subject. Therefore the purpose of this essay is not to lay claim to the fact that these are the very first Sherlock Holmes performers for a particular country, but they are simply the earliest performers my minor research has uncovered. I present this essay with the hope that the readers of it can supply me with much more information on the subject.

England - Great Britian

1893 - Charles Hallam Elton Brookfield (1857 – 1913) who played Sherlock Holmes on the London stage in “Under the Clock”, was born in London which makes him first ever Sherlock Holmes in any medium AND first Englishman to play Holmes.



Charles H.E. Brookfield as Sherlock Holmes

“November 1893, the month before Sherlock Holmes supposedly fell to his death at the end of the adventure ‘The Final Problem’, saw the character make his debut on the stage. ‘Under the Clock’, a one-act musical satire, opened on the twenty-fifth of November at the Royal Court Theatre, London, forming part of a triple bill. The play was written by Charles Brookfield and Seymour Hicks, who would also portray Holmes and Watson respectively (albeit with a strange choice of wardrobe – Holmes wore black tights and sported a full beard, while Watson’s apparel included a monocle and a pirate’s cap). The play and its satirical tone, which was merely used as a front to throw mocking asides at certain members of the acting establishment, was given short shrift by the reviewers as well as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. Despite this, the play achieved seventy-eight performances before the curtain fell for the final time on the twenty-fifth January, 1894.”¹

United States

1899 - Ferris Hartman (1861 - 1931) was the 1st ever American stage Sherlock Holmes. Ferris Hartman took to the stage as Holmes on 24th April 1899 in the play “The Man in The Moon”. This means he preceded the legendary William Gillette as the 1st American Stage Sherlock Holmes by nearly 6 months.



Ferris Hartman

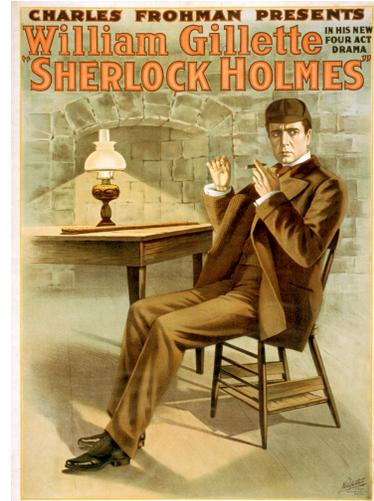


**“The Man in The Moon”
Program Cove**

“...New York theatrical impresario George Lederer produced “The Man in The Moon” with music by the well-known composer Reginald DeKoven (who wrote

¹ <http://paulstuarthayes.blogspot.com/2013/11/charles-brookfield-firstsherlock-holmes.html>

‘Oh Promise Me’) and libretto by Louis Harrison and Stanislaus Strange. Part ballet, part ‘women in lingerie’, “The Man in The Moon” featured both Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle as characters, with Conan Doyle for a reason that is difficult to fathom, affecting a Dutch accent. Before going on tour, “The Man in The Moon” ran 182 performances in New York. Not bad. But the real blockbuster was going to be the Gillette’s play.”²



Argentina

1980 - Alberto Olmedo (1933 - 1988), an Argentinian comedian/actor, played Sherlock Holmes in an eight minute sketch titled ‘Sherlock Holmes Cordobes’ on the “Alberto and Susana” TV show (1980). (Found by Ray Wilcockson!)



Alberto Olmedo

You can watch the full skit of Alberto Olmedo in ‘Sherlock Holmes Cordobes’ on youtube at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugIX8F_maU0&list=WL&index=16

² Panek, Leroy Lad, “The Origins of the American Detective Story”, McFarland & Co., 2006

Armenia

Hovhannes Zarifian (1879 - 1937), Mugerdich Noorian, and Elia Kimitian formed the Hai Arvest Taderakhoump, The Armenian Art Theater, which performed all its plays in the Armenian language, in New York City, during the 1920s and 1930s. One of the non-Armenian plays in its repertory was William Gillette's "Sherlock Holmes".³



Elia Kimitian

Australia

1911- Oliver Peters Heggie (1877 - 1936). O. P. Heggie played Sherlock Holmes with Claude King as Dr. Watson and Lyn Harding as Dr. Grimesby Rylott in "The Speckled Band: An Adventure of Sherlock Holmes", under the management of Mr. Arthur Hardy in London at the Strand Theatre, February 6-25, 1911.⁴



O. P. Heggie

³ Contemporary Armenian American Drama: An Anthology edited by Nishan Parlakian, S. Peter Cowe

⁴ <https://www.lib.umn.edu/scrbm/ush/volume-3-section-XX>

O. P. Heggie “was an Australian film and theatre actor. He was born at Angaston, South Australia to a local sheep farmer and educated at Whinham College and the Adelaide Conservatoire of Music.”⁵ So even though Harry Plimmer (see New Zealand) and Canadian Cuyler Hastings performed Holmes in Gillette’s play first in Australia, and obscure Australian actor J.L. Lawrence played Holmes in "In the Power of Sherlock Holmes" (1912) in Australia, O.P. Heggie I’d label the first native born Australian Sherlock Holmes performer. Australian Sherlockian Bill Barnes adds this bit of O.P. Heggie Information. “British provincial and touring company productions: Arthur Hardy’s South Company, Sept 1910-(?)1912 with O. P. Heggie as Sherlock Holmes, Grendon Bentley as Dr. Watson, and E. Vassal Vaughan as Grimsby Roylett.”⁶ This would appear to indicate that Heggie played Holmes as early as September 1910, 5 months before he appeared at the Strand Theatre in London in the role.

Austria

1917 - Hugo Flink (1879 -1974), born in Vienna, the versatile Austrian stage and film actor appeared as Sherlock Holmes in four German made silent films. A series of feature films for Kowo-Gesellschaft für Filmfabrikation, Germany (unauthorized of course), were produced in the years (1917 - 1919). I’m not for certain how many were made, although I have come up with 14 titles. Three different actors played Sherlock Holmes, with Flink being one of them, but all were directed by Karl Heinz Rolf.



Hugo Flink

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O.P._Heggie

⁶ Michael Pointer’s book *The Public Life of Sherlock Holmes* , 1975, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, p.129

1917 - “Der Erdstrommotor” or, “The Earthquake Motor” - Hugo Flink as Sherlock Holmes. Kowo-Films (Germany).

1917 - “Die Kasette” or, “The Mysterious Casket” - Hugo Flink as Sherlock Holmes. Kowo-Films (Germany).

1917 - “Der Schlangenring” or, “The Snake Ring” - Hugo Flink as Sherlock Holmes. Kowo-Films (Germany).

1917 - “Die Indiesche” or, “The Indian Spider” - Hugo Flink as Sherlock Holmes. Kowo-Films (Germany).

Azerbaijan

Haji Ismailov as Sherlock Holmes, and **Tarlan Nur Yashar** as Dr. Watson, will be looking for a rich legacy in Baku, Azerbaijan, in an absurd comedy called "1,000,000 Manat" (2015). In the film, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson receive a letter at Baker Street, which states that one of their close relatives, after his death, bequeathed his rich legacy, 1 million manat is in Azerbaijan. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson urgently fly from London to Baku, but learn about the disappearance of the money. They then begin an investigation.



Haji Ismailov and Tarlan Nur Yashar

You can view the trailer for this film at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=17&v=2-ZRAMPQV2E>

Bangladesh

Mohi Reza as Sherlock Holmes and **Naveed Hossain** as Dr. John Watson, in “Sherlock Holmes in Bangladesh: A Study in Red and Green” (2013), a fan film by Hundred Stories High, written and directed by Aaraf Afzal. “Set in modern day Bangladesh, Dr. John Watson is acquainted to the eccentric yet genius Sherlock Holmes by unusual circumstance. Now, he is about to discover there is more to this man's life than meets the eye, as the two become entangled in their first case together and join forces against a mysterious opponent.”⁷



Naveed Hossain and Mohi Reza

Watch video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oknmxnMM31c>

Belarus (**See Lithuania)

Sherlockian Michael Chumakov, from Minsk, Belarus says, “I think that it's not correct to call Algimantas Masiulis ‘the first Lithuanianian Holmes’, because the movie was made by Belarusian team, at the ‘Belalarusfilm’ studio. Masiulis was invited because of his ‘european’ face and manner. But Lithuania has nothing in common with this movie. He is the first (and the only one) Belarusian Holmes, not Lithuanian.” Respectfully, Algimantas Masiulis in this essay can be seen under Lithuania.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oknmxnMM31c>



Algimantas Masiulis

Belgium

1902 - Marcel Myin, of Flemish ancestry, appeared as Sherlock Holmes in the William Gillette play “Sherlock Holmes” at the Grand Theatre in Amsterdam in 1902. You might say he was Holland’s first Holmes performer too, since the Flanders area of Northern Belgium borders the Netherlands and the Flemish people speak Dutch, and after all he performed in Amsterdam, but we are going to classify him as Belgium’s first Sherlock Holmes performer.



Marcel Myin as Sherlock Holmes

Brazil



Gregory Peck



“The Boys of Brazil”

Gregory Peck - now wait a minute, we are looking for the first Brazilian Sherlock Holmes' dynamic duo - not for “The Boys of Brazil” - oops! Since Joaquim de Almeida, who played Sherlock Holmes in “A Samba for Sherlock” (1999) (O Xangô de Baker Street), a Sherlock Holmes actually film shot in Brazil, was from Portugal, we placed him there. So, how about this next choice, once again from Sherlockian Ray Wilcockson. The World Cup wasn't the only thing happening in Brazil in 2014.

2014 - Ícaro Silva (1987 -) plays Sherlock Holmes in the stage play “221b Baker Street”. Sherlock Holmes came alive on stage at the Federal Justice Cultural Center, from August 8th until September 14th, in the stage spectacle “221b Baker Street”. For the first time in Rio, a show deals with the universe around investigative detective



Ícaro Silva



“221b Baker Street”

“221b Baker Street” explores the mythical figure of Sherlock Holmes, detective known for investigating peculiar and difficult cases to be unraveled. This inspired comedy along the lines of physical theater, he and his sidekick Dr. Watson face a major challenge: to capture a serial killer and prevent more victims make the streets of London.⁸

See more of Brazil’s “221b Baker Street” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-EADZkWA-M>

Burma

1961 - Harry H Corbett (1925 - 1982) played Sherlock Holmes in “They Might Be Giants” in London, on stage at the Theatre Royal, June 28-July 29, 1961.⁹ Harry Corbett was born in Rangoon, Burma.



Harry H Corbett

(Photo from “They Might Be Giants” thanks to Roger Johnson)

⁸ http://www.boadiversao.com.br/guia/rio-de-janeiro/arteteatro/peca/id/2163/baker_street_221b

⁹ <https://www.lib.umn.edu/scrbm/ush/volume-3-section-XX>

Canada

1900 - Reuben Fax (1862-1908) born in Canada of Scots-Irish parentage, had the role of John Forman in the Nov., 1899 - June, 1900, "Sherlock Holmes" at the Garrick Theatre in N.Y.C. What is significant about this is that Fax was the understudy to the great William Gillette. A little known fact is that when Gillette became sick in April 1900 for a short period of time Reuben Fax played the Holmes role¹⁰, thus making him Canada's first Sherlock Holmes, rather than the more famous Canadian Cuyler Hastings who toured Canada in the William Gillette play in the early 1900's.



Reuben Fax



Cuyler Hastings

China

1931 - Li Pingqian (1902 - 1984) appears as Sherlock Holmes in the silent film “福爾摩斯偵探案”, or “Fu er mo si zhen tan an”, or "Sherlock Holmes Detects The Case" or "Stories of Sherlock Holmes" for Shao Zuiweng Films.

¹⁰ "Examier" (Launchston, Tas.) 4/21/1900



Li Pingqian

“During a burglary of his mansion, wealthy businessman Yang Bofan is murdered. Concluding it happened when he accidentally walked in on the intruders and sent them into panic, the police launch a citywide dragnet for suspects, concentrating on known burglars. But one person apparently uninvolved in the case has doubts: a young woman, a shopkeeper named Shen Liyun, comes to consulting detective Sherlock Holmes and asks him to look into the case. She explains that several months earlier the murdered man had begun regular visits to her shop and gradually made her acquaintance, inquiring into her background, getting to know her, and offering business and financial advice. Her mysterious benefactor even invested in her small business so she could expand it. But while the young woman was puzzled by the older man's attention to her, at no time did she feel his kindness was out of romantic interest. Whatever his motivation, she feels he deserves the investigation be widened to ensure justice is done. Holmes accepts the case, and in a search of the victim's mansion he uncovers clues the police had missed, which lead him to an amusement park. There he finds additional clues that lead Holmes and his friend Watson to a seedy tavern, located at No.13 Waterfront Road, an address matching that on an envelope found in the victim's mansion. The tavern is actually the secret headquarters of a criminal gang, and the two investigators have walked into a trap. They are captured and locked up in a cellar. Holmes is able to find a way out through a tunnel, so the two escape and go to the police, but when they raid the tavern, the police find it cleaned out and abandoned. Holmes and Watson return home to learn there has been an attempt on Shen Liyun's life, for no apparent reason. This strange attack on the young woman steers Holmes into exploring an alternate path of investigation. After further inquiries and serious thinking, he disguises himself as a beggar and enters a cave where many beggars live. After talking to various beggars, he uncovers another clue in one's possession, a pearl stolen during the robbery. When Holmes finds out how the beggar obtained it, he leads

the police back to the mansion. There, Holmes explains how the clues led him to this resolution of the mystery: the murder was the real objective and the robbery was actually a diversionary action to cover it up. Also, the mysterious attack on Shen Liyun was directly related to the crime. The villain behind the plot was Yang Bofan's younger brother Yang Jifan, who hired the gang to commit the robbery and murder. Jifan's motive: his elder brother had learned the young shopkeeper was his long-lost daughter from an early love affair, and after locating his only child and mentoring her in business, Yang Bofan was planning to leave his own business and his entire fortune to her instead of Jifan.”¹¹

Commonwealth of The Bahamas

1903 - Bert A. Williams (1875-1922) born in Nassau, Bahamas, played a Sherlock Holmes character renamed Shylock Homestead, and called “Shy” by his friends, in the African-American stage musical “In Dahomey”. Williams had a partner named George W. Walker (1872 -1911). In “In Dahomey”, Walker portrayed slippery Rareback Pinkerton, a Watson type character, opposite Williams’ Shylock “Shy” Homestead.



**Shylock Homestead & Rareback Pinkerton
Bert A. Williams & George W. Walker**

¹¹ <http://www.chinesemirror.com/index/2013/01/>

Czechoslovakia

1923 - Eman Fiala (1899 - 1970) appeared as Sherlock Holmes II in “The Kidnapping of Fux Banker” (Únos bankéře Fuxe) (1923) a Czech comedy.

“The banker Fux and his creditor Tom Darey want to get married. The banker's daughter Daisy in her father's name, put an advertisement in a paper. She wants father to meet her friend Maud. She, herself, makes the acquaintance of Darey who has her followed by detective Sherlock Holmes II. The latter finds her and tries to kidnap her but he takes her father instead. After a number of intrigues, all ends well. Holmes is let off the hook and Tom and the banker win their girls.”¹²



Eman Fiala

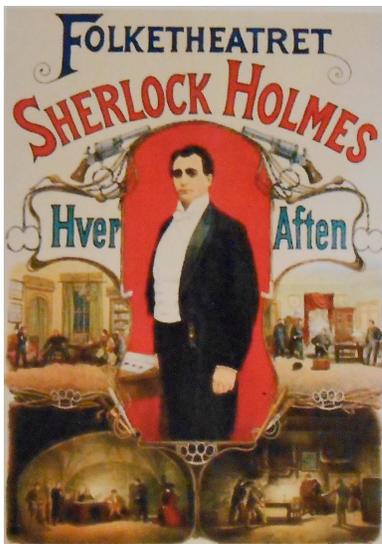
A Czech version of the Keystone Kops. Eman Fiala would also appear in the 1932 Czech film “Lelicek in the Services of Sherlock Holmes”, but with the more famous Martin Fric playing Sherlock Holmes role.

Watch ‘Únos bankéře Fuxe’ at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnIjzjMsgYg&list=PL500C217Fo42A037E&index=2>

¹² Lamač, Ondra, ‘Karel Lamač - Únos bankéře Fuxe 2’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnIjzjMsgYg&list=PL500C217Fo42A037E&index=2>

Denmark

1901 - Jens Frederik Sigfred Dorph-Petersen (1845 - 1927) - Dorph-Petersen's biggest breakthrough in the theater world, was when he performed the first Danish Sherlock Holmes play in the People's Theatre in 4 acts entitled "Sherlock Holmes" after the American actor's William Gillette's famous play of the same name. Dorph-Petersen himself played Sherlock Holmes, where the actor Emil Helsengreen played arch-enemy Professor Moriarty and the play was a huge success in the People's theatrical history. Even the creator of Sherlock Holmes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was proud of the play, both in the U.S. and Denmark. ¹³ "The play was a pirate version of the Gillette original, written by the Danish sea captain Walter Christmas. For that reason I doubt that ACD was proud of the Danish play - I don't think he got payed for it. I notice that your source mentions that ACD was proud of it, and I have now contacted the man who has published that web page, to check what source he has for that fact."¹⁴



**Folketeatret, Copenhagen
December 26th, 1901**



J. F. S. Dorph-Petersen

(With special thanks to Ted Bergman for the photos!)

¹³ http://sherlockholmes.beboer2650.dk/jens_frederik_siegfred_dorph-p.html

¹⁴ Bostrom, Mattias, e-mail

Estonia

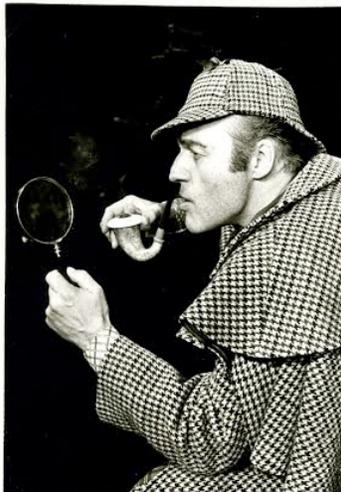
1998 - Marko Matvere (1968 -) played Sherlock Holmes in "Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson" on the stage of the Tallinn City Theatre. Tarmo Tamm played Dr Watson. Marko Matvere is an Estonian actor, born in Pärnu, Estonia. (Thanks to Sherlockian Ray Wilcockson - for this entry.)



Marko Matvere and Tarmo Tamm

Finland

1976 - Kurt Ingvall (1925 - 1987) played Sherlock Holmes and Göran Schauman Doktor Watson, in William Gillette's "Sherlock Holmes", at the Svenska Teatern, (December 30, 1976-?), in Helsinki.



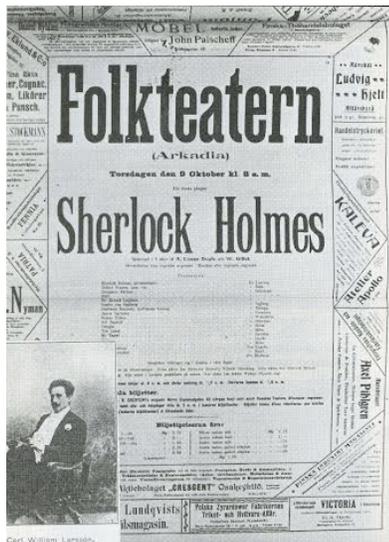
Kurt Ingvall som Sherlock Holmes.
Svenska Teatern i Helsingfors.
1976-12-30

Kurt Ingvall

Surely someone out there must have an earlier Sherlock Holmes performer for Finland than 1976? I sure don't, but I'm waiting eagerly for your suggestions.

Yes we have an attempt at an answer on Finland from Sherlockian Elina Karvo of Sherlock Finland who tweeted me, "Gillette's play was performed in Finland already in 1905 with C. William Larsson playing Holmes. That's earliest one I know. It's this bilingual country of ours, the play was at Folkteatern in Helsinki. It was an extremely successful, so the play run for 5 years at least, I think. Larsson's portrayal was very well received." The one problem being the play may have been in Finland but William Larsson was Swedish. The search continues.

From Sherlockian Ted Bergman more on William Larsson. "William Larsson (1873-1926) appeared as Sherlock Holmes in Gillette's play at Folkteatern (Arkadia) in Helsingfors (Helsinki) in Finland for 32 performances, starting on October 9th, 1902. The play was performed in Swedish which, beside Finnish, is still an official language there. Finland had been a part of Sweden for 600 years when the two countries separated in 1809."¹⁵



Carl William Larsson.



Carl William Larsson

Folkteatern in Helsinki

William Larsson

(Photos from Ted Bergman)

¹⁵ Bergman, Ted, e-mail

1957 - Jalmari Rinnes (1893 - 1985) born in Asikkala, Finland as Jalmari Ivar Gröndahl, was Sherlock Holmes in, “Sherlock Holmes ja kaljupäisten kerho” (1957) “Sherlock Holmes and The Club of Bald Headed Men”, a Sumoen TV movie. (Found by Lew Irish & translated by Elina Karvo). Interesting unrelated fact, the Japanese originally translated “The League of Red-Headed Men” as “The League of Bald Headed Men” because they all had black hair!



Jalmari Rinnes

France

1907 - Firmin Gemier (1869 - 1933) appeared as Sherlock Holmes, in William Gillette’s “Sherlock Holmes, in 1907 at Théâtre Antoine in Paris. Despite his lack of physical resemblance to Sherlock Holmes, Firmin Gemier was well received well by the public and praised by the critics.



Firmin Gemier



Ted Bergman has succeeded in securing the three stage stills which follow, from the stage of Theatre Antoine in Paris, France with M Gémier as Holmes.

Firmin Gemier

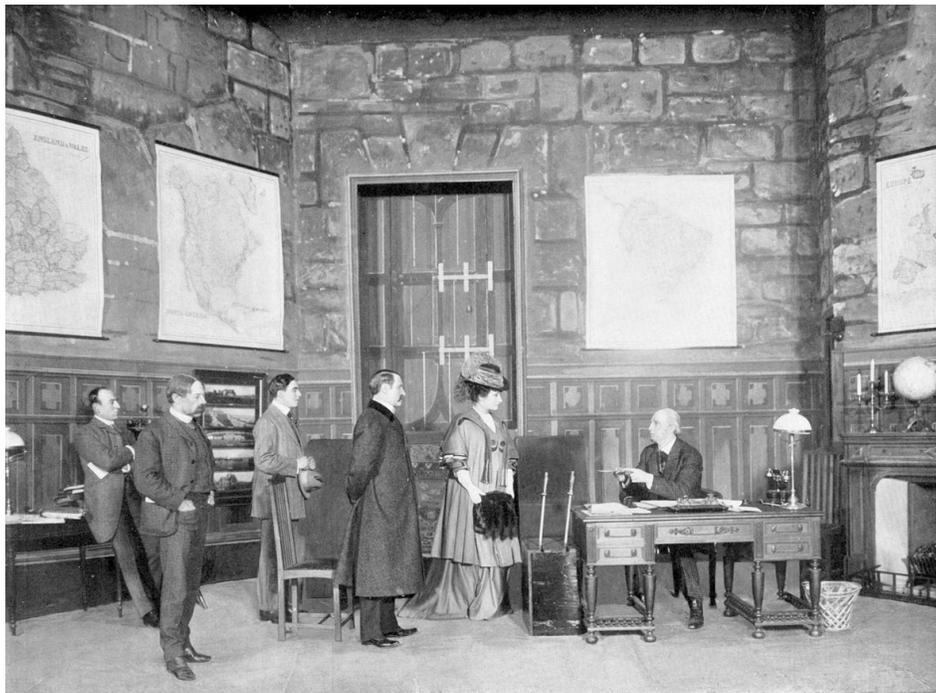




Photo Luchet.

LE PROFESSEUR MORIARTY
(M. Harry Baer)

SHERLOCK HOLMES
(M. Gémier)

THÉÂTRE ANTOINE. — SHERLOCK HOLMES. — ACTE III

Firmin Gemier

So ends Part I with France and Part II of “Who’s On First, It’s Not So Elementary” will continue forward starting with Germany.

