

# Silent Sherlock

## Sherlock Holmes and the Silent Film Era

by

Howard Ostrom

### Part Six (1912 Continued)

Part six continues by finishing up with various plots, reviews, and advanced notices of this series from old movie magazines. from "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" series which ended part five of "Silent Sherlock".

Two page Ad for Union Features (formerly Universal Features) - "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" - "There is not another character in all world's fiction to approach this doctor-student-detective in point of public popularity. His army of admirers is going to make it an over-flow attraction. They will not miss seeing their hero idol.

These are the subjects in their probable order of release: "Speckled Band", "Reygate Squires", "Beryl Coronet", "The Copper Beeches", "Mystery of Boscombe Vale", "The Stolen Papers", "Silver Blaze".<sup>1</sup>

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By SIR CONAN DOYLE

*Produced with the exclusive permission and under the personal supervision of the author.*

This series comprises six two-reel subjects of the most daring, fascinating adventures in the Alleys of Crime—“Sherlock Holmes.” Produced in England by the “*Franco-British Film Co.*” Every scene in each story is played on the exact spot about which the incident was written.

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We wish, if possible, to place the entire set of releases with individual state right buyers.

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## “UNIVERSAL FEATURES”

225 West 42nd Street, NEW YORK CITY

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<sup>1</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 14 Oct. - Dec. 1912 pgs. 578/79

"The Speckled Band" by G. F. Blaisdell - "The first of the series of six Sherlock Holmes pictures is now being shown at the offices of Union Features. "The Speckled Band", as will be the case with its filmed successors, is in two reels. The most interesting fact in connection with these adventures of the greatest detective in modern fiction is that Dr. A. Conan Doyle, the popular creator himself, supervised the production. This will give satisfaction to the thousands of readers of these absorbing tales who at this time may not be followers of motion pictures. That these productions on the screen of some of the more important incidents in the career of the mythical detective-scientist will bring to the picture houses a new clientele goes without saying. If others in the series are of the same standard as that maintained throughout "The Speckled Band" the newcomers in filmdom are bound to be favorably impressed. The pictures are produced by the Franc-British Film Co. With one exception all the actors are English. The exception is the impersonator of Holmes. This character is portrayed by M. Trelville, who has much screen experience in France. The



portrayal of Roylott, the fiendish father who in order to retain possession of the patrimony of his daughters accomplished the slaughter of one of them, and attempted the death of the second, was of the best. So are the settings -- particularly the lawn scene of the betrothal of Julia, enlivened by the quartet of dancers. The actor's conception of Holmes will be of the greatest interest, perhaps, to those who have followed the detective through his many adventures. If the filmed interpretation shall show more of animation and less of taciturnity than was expected, allowance must be made for the absence of speech and the necessity for sufficient action adequately to indicate the intentions as well as the observations of the actor. There are necessity of some departures from the written story. These will be noted chiefly as affecting those parts of the plot which were related by the surviving daughter to the detective and Dr. Watson, who, by the way, does

not appear in the picture. Here they are portrayed on the screen in their natural chronological order. The story opens with a young man proying to Mr. Roylott for the hand of his daughter Julia. At first the father declines to sanction the match, but later recants. Mr. Roylott again examines the copy of his wife's will, which provides that the husband as trustee shall divide her fortune between her daughters, each of whom shall take possession upon their marriage. In agreeing to the marriage of Julia he determines at the same time to take steps to frustrate it in such a manner as to leave the inheritance securely in his grasp. Of a strange visitor Mr. Roylott makes a strange purchase - a securely fastened box. On the morning of the betrothal



day Julia tells her sister of a peculiar hissing she heard during the night. When, a few nights later, the household is aroused by a shriek from Julia's room, all rush in to find her dead on the floor. Helen appeals to Sherlock Holmes. The detective goes to the Roylott home and makes secret investigations. He enters the room of the dead girl, discovers the suspended cord above the bed so securely fastened to the floor, notes the concealed aperture in the wall; on the opposite side of the partition examines the safe and also hears hissing inside. When the father informs Helen that on account of the broken windows in her room (which he has carefully smashed) she will be obliged to sleep in the room formerly occupied by her sister, Holmes acts. He had previously disguised himself, and as Juanes Rilto asked Roylott for the hand of Helen. Now he enters the room himself and awaits with confidence the appearance of the snake. When the serpent, released by Roylott, slowly comes down the wall Holmes does not attempt to kill it; he chases it back. A moment later the waiting detective and the girl hear a cry. They rush in the next room and there find Roylott dead on the floor and the snake crawling over him. The plan so carefully planned by Roylott -- the opening of the safe and of the aperture in the partition that leads to the

room of his daughter, and the smearing of the path with milk so that the hungry snake would go straight to the bed of his daughter -- had failed"<sup>2</sup>

Interesting is it not that in the above article with pictures of 'The Speckled Band' it says that Georges Treville was French, and the only actor in the pictures who was NOT ENGLISH – which seems to make the mysterious "Mr Moyse" English. He isn't in The Speckled Band photos either?

"Silver Blaze"— "Silver Blaze was the favorite! And a beautiful piece of horseflesh she was. Colonel Ross was expecting a lot from the wonderful animal on Derby Day. And then came despair! Early in the morning the stable-boy is aroused from a deep sleep caused by a drug, to find Silver Blaze gone—and the jockey, Straker, dead, with a crushed skull, in the open field nearby. Sherlock Holmes has first-hand information of this case since he was at the home of his old friend Ross, when the Colonel's beautiful horse disappeared. An investigation by the great detective gives him a sure clue to the whereabouts of the animal and he acts promptly. Colonel Ross insists that he must withdraw the favorite from the race program, but Holmes says "No!" and his command is emphatic. Rather bewildered but trusting the wisdom of his old friend, Colonel Ross goes to the track on Derby Day, but is dismayed when he can find no trace of good old 'Silver Blaze.' But Holmes bids him wait and he insists that his horse will come through a sure winner, despite his apparent mysterious absence. The race is finished and the winner comes to the Stables—and here to the nervous and astonished Colonel Ross, a little water and a soft cloth remove from the forehead of the winner a dark stain which had covered up the great blazing white mark which had given the beautiful animal the name of 'Silver Blaze.' Holmes' investigation had trailed the Derby favorite to the home of trainer Brown and he forced Brown to admit having the horse. The jockey, Straker, had attempted to steal the animal and had drugged the stable boy, but he was thrown and kicked by the racer and so his villainous plans were suddenly halted. Brown found "Silver Blaze" in the open field and thought to make him unrecognizable by painting over the great white 'blaze,' but he had not calculated on the genius of Sherlock Holmes."<sup>3</sup>

"The Stolen Papers" — "The young diplomat Phelps is spending a few days at his fiancée's in the country, when he is suddenly called to London by his Minister to copy some very important documents. Phelps is accompanied to London by his future brother-in-law, Harrison, who must see a creditor and

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<sup>2</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 14 Oct. - Dec. 1912 pg. 779

<sup>3</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 15 Jan. - Mar. 1913

try to get an extension, but the creditor insists on being paid immediately. Harrison is embarrassed, and must get money. Phelps stepped out of his office only for a moment and upon his return finds that the very important document is stolen. This so affects his mind that the Minister of War has him taken to his fiancée's home and lodged in her brother's room, where Sherlock Holmes comes to see him, called by Miss Harrison. During the night Phelps believes he has a nightmare. He has seen a ghost in his room. Everybody believes that he has hallucinations. Sherlock things (*sic*) the matter over and decides to take Phelps with him to London. Sherlock returns the following night and sees a shadow enter the room, open a little trap in the floor out of which he pulls something. As he passes the window, Sherlock springs at him and after a struggle, seizes a paper which proves to be the stolen document. He also secures the ring of the man who was playing the ghost. The following day there is a dinner at Sherlock Holmes', the document is brought in on a large dish. Holmes comes to Harrison, who alone does not congratulate him and asks to shake hands. The ring is missing. Sherlock gives it back to him and for the happiness of Phelps and Miss Harrison, he will keep silent on the brother's crime."<sup>4</sup>

"The Musgrave Ritual" - "The strained expression on the face of one maid servant in a group of six, gives to the mind of Sherlock Holmes, the master of all detectives, the clue to the unraveling of this remarkable and unusual mystery. The maid and the butler planes and carried out a daring robbery in which they secured a mysterious ritual which told of a hidden treasure and gave directions for the finding of the money and jewels. Following the directions, the butler and the maid locate this hidden fortune, but coming suddenly in possession of such enormous riches, turned the head of this daring woman. The decision was reached in an instant! 'I will have it all'— and just as the butler handed out the treasure laden box, she allowed the heavy flag stone to crash down upon him, imprisoning him in this death trap where the treasure had lain for years. When he arrived on the scene, Holmes wanted a clue. By clever grouping of the servants of the household, he watched their faces. Only the maid recognized the ritual and her startled look gave Holmes his entering wedge. The forcing of a confession from the woman is quickly brought about in most dramatic fashion."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 15 Jan. - Mar. 1913

<sup>5</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 15 Jan. - Mar. 1913

"The Beryl Coronet" - A torn piece of cloth hanging on a nail proved the undoing of Moriarty. Sherlock Holmes' keen methods and his daring actions, when convinced that he is on the right trail, have unraveled many a complicated mystery, but in none have his remarkable analytic powers been more forcefully demonstrated than in "The Beryl Coronet." The very valuable coronet having been left with Banker Holder as security for a loan, is stolen by a daring thief. The fiancée of Holder's beautiful daughter Mary rescues the coronet, after an exciting encounter with the thieves, only to be accused of the theft of two jewels broken from it in the struggle, when it is discovered in his possession by Holder and his family, who were aroused by the commotion. Mary never doubts her sweetheart, however, and with the assistance of the great detective, the real culprits are brought to justice. Starting with a piece of torn cloth as his only clue, Holmes rapidly works out in his own peculiar manner, the solution of the mystery.<sup>6</sup>

The year 1912 would also see the continuation of the series of Sherlock Holmes parody-comedies featuring the legendary Mack Sennett (1880 - 1960) and Fred Mace (1878 -1917). After one more effort as the "Biograph Sleuths", Sennett and Mace emerged "The Sleuths", now a part of Mack Sennett's newly formed Keystone studios. The films featured both men in full Sherlockian garb.

**1912 - "Their First Kidnapping Case"** - Mack Sennett and Fred Mace. Biograph Pictures.

**1912 - "At It Again"** - Mack Sennett and Fred Mace. Keystone Films.

**1912 - "A Bear Escape"** - Mack Sennett and Fred Mace. Keystone Films.

"At It Again" - "This picture revives the travesty on Sherlock Holmes, in which Max Sennett and Fred Mace won unbounded popularity. A woman receives an anonymous letter advising her that her husband is flirting, and engages the detectives. They track the wrong man and spy on him, arresting him in his own home making love to his own wife. It develops that the man is a police captain, and the 'sleuths' are punished for their error"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 15 Jan. - Mar. 1913

<sup>7</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 14 Oct. - Dec. 1912 pg. 421



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## "Mabel's Lovers"

Mabel arrives at the summer resort and has many lovers. Possessed of a beautiful figure, she decides to put the men to a test, and when donning her bathing suit fills her stockings with numerous bumps. When she discards her coat at the beach all the men beat a hasty retreat with the exception of one who "peeped" when Mabel was fixing up. Her next appearance in her bathing suit, minus the ungainly pretuberances causes consternation among the men who have been fooled.



## "AT IT AGAIN"

This picture revives the travesty on Sherlock Holmes, in which Mack Sennett and Fred Mace won unbounded popularity. A woman receives an anonymous letter advising her that her husband is hiring, and engages the detectives. They track the wrong man and spy on him, arresting him in his own home while making love to his own wife. It develops that the man is a police captain, and the "detectives" are punished for their error.

**KEYSTONE FILM CO.** 150 East 14th St.  
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Comments on the Films column - "At It Again" - (Keystone) - (Split Reel with "Mabel's Lovers") - "Two amateur Sherlock Holmes detectives dominate this picture with their antics. They succeed in jumbling the plot somewhat, but they are really funny, and the plot is not important, they may be forgiven. Mack sennett and Fred Mace play the twin detective roles."<sup>8</sup>

End of Part Six  
1912 continues in Part Seven

<sup>8</sup> "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 14 Oct. - Dec. 1912 pg. 660