

Silent Sherlock
Sherlock Holmes and the Silent Film Era

by

Howard Ostrom

Part Two (1909)

The year 1909 witnessed the continuation of the first actual Sherlock Holmes film series by Nordisk Film Company of Denmark with three new films.

1909 - "Sangerindens Diamanter" (Denmark) or, **"The Theft of the Diamonds"** or, **"Sherlock IV"** - Viggo Larsen as Sherlock Holmes. Nordisk Film Co.



1909 - "Droske Nr. 519" (Denmark) or, **"Cab No. 519"** or, **"The Legacy Robbery"** or, **"Sherlock V"** - Viggo Larsen as Sherlock Holmes. Nordisk Film Co.



1909 - "Den Gra Dame" or, "Af Sherlock Holmes Oplevelser VI" (Denmark) or, **"The Grey Dame" or, "The Grey Lady" or, "Sherlock Holmes's Memories" or, "Sherlock VI"** - Viggo Larsen as Sherlock Holmes. Nordisk Film Co.



Here are bits of interesting information from old magazines about these three 1909 Great Northern films.

"The Theft of the Diamonds" - (Great Northern) "...As she enters the room she notices the confusion, and detecting him she grasps the telephone, and calls for Sherlock Holmes, the great detective, but before she can say anything he rushes from his hiding place and forces the telephone away from her. Sherlock Holmes, on the other end of the wire, hears only a scream, and immediately locating the number rushes to her home. Farley in the meantime has escaped to the roof and when Holmes arrives and see Miss Hayes unconscious, he notices the rope and quickly clammers up after the scoundrel. Farley from above, notices this and loosens the rope, but Holmes luckily saves himself by clinging to the balcony..... Farley from behind a chimney shoots at the approaching men and after his gun is empty runs..... he falls and is captured and bound....."¹

"The Theft of the Diamonds" - (Great Northern) - "This firm has made an attractive feature of films of this type in the past, its Sherlock Holmes being graphic representatives of this fact. In this film some very dramatic situations are reproduced and the acting is so sympathetic and the actors develop so much

¹ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 6 Jan. - June 1910 pg. 532

capability in developing their parts that the audience becomes absorbed in the picture and regrets when it closes. ..."²

"Cab Number 519" - (Great Northern) - "From Sherlock Holmes' memoirs - Mr. B. is alone with his friend H. when he receives a letter which informs him his uncle is dead and has left him \$200,000. he is very happy over this good news and his friend seems to take part in his joy, but he quietly makes up his mind to take his friend's place and get hold of the money in due course. H. makes haste to secure an assistant, and old John Smith promises to get B. out of the way for a considerable share of the spoil. B. wants to get off the same evening but H. persuades him to buy a new portmanteau before leaving, and as soon as B. has gone to a leather seller's shop, H. hurries to his assistants and begs them to act quickly. As B. comes out of the shop, a cab passes slowly by as if by accident. He calls to the driver, gets in, and leans back very joyfully, but immediately he feels a sweet smell and falls back unconscious. The cab stops in front of John Smith's house. B. is carried in and a moment later H. is in possession of the papers. When B. left the leather seller's shop he left his pocketbook on the counter by accident. This small circumstance is the cause of his life being saved. The leather seller finds the forgotten pocketbook takes it and runs out just in time to see B. drive away and notice the number of the cab 519. The next morning he takes the pocketbook to B's house and when he learns B has not yet come home he understands that a crime has been committed and goes at once to Sherlock Holmes. The only clue in the case is the number of the cab, but this is quite sufficient to the intelligent detective. In less than an hour the cab is found and Sherlock Holmes is on the box of the cab dressed as a driver. Thus the detective instead of the criminal cabman fetches B. and drives him to the steamer where the young man is taken senseless on board. The ship is now in open sea, as Smith, who has played the part of warden to a poor young gentleman who is insane, comes out from his cabin, carrying B., who is still senseless; but as the criminal is almost to throw the helpless young man overboard, he is seized by two strong men and thrown down on the deck. The sailors appear and carry Smith away to put him under lock and key, while Sherlock Holmes himself carries B. into his cabin. Now Sherlock Holmes has yet to unveil the false friend. He is caught and confronted with his assistants and victim just as he is at the solicitor's office, about to receive all the money. He tries to escape punishment by killing himself, but he is at the last moment prevented by Sherlock Holmes, and committed to prison."³

² "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 6 Jan. - June 1910 pg. 510

³ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 4 Jan. - Jun. 1909 pg. 769

"Cab Number 519" - A Strong Dramatic Story by Great Northern - "A well told detective story is always sure of success either in book form or as a play. We all love mystery; we all love plot; we all love to see how it is woven, and above all things, we all love to see mystery unraveled. Our appreciation of this kind of dramatic writing rises in proportion to the naturalness of the various incidents which make up the story. The famous Sherlock Holmes series of stories, that owe their origin to the brain of Sir A. Conan Doyle, are popular because Holmes, after all, is only a clever man of the world with highly developed reasoning powers. He is not a mere stage detective looking preternaturally wise and relying only upon time-worn expedients. No; he goes about his work in an ordinary matter-of-fact style, plus, of course, a little permissible exaggeration of acumen, and this is why the Sherlock Holmes stories are popular. In the film under review we are treated to a very melodramatic story, very skillfully worked out, which we think will be popular with all classes of audience. The picture is full of excitement from start to finish. A young man suddenly inherits a fortune. The man's friend decides to make himself master of that fortune, and so by the aid of an unscrupulous assistant he manages to kidnap his friend, to impersonate him, and to actually obtain the money. Now, to reach this point a bunch of startling adventures have to be gone through. The real owner of the fortune is lured into a cab, and is drugged in that vehicle. He is taken on a ship and placed in a cabin in charge of one of the villains of the piece. But Holmes has been busy. Early on in the game he got the number of the cab and traced it in its wanderings to the house which the unconscious victim was temporarily placed. Holmes runs the cabman to earth, binds his arms and renders him helpless. Then he starts in pursuit of the ship. He gets on board. He takes the cabin next to that in which the drugged victim lies, and just at the moment that the latter is to be thrown overboard by the man whose power he is Holmes appears, effects a rescue and knocks the villain down. The final scene of the play shows the impersonator taking possession of the money, when, just as he is handling it, the real owner appears. The impersonator, after denials and struggles, is arrested, and all ends happily, thanks to the skills of Sherlock Holmes. The story is handled clearly and explicitly throughout. It is told against a number of well chosen scenes and the excitement raises to its greatest height on the deck of the steamer, where the body of the unconscious victim is to be thrown overboard. The drugging in the cab is also an exciting moment. Indeed the play is dramatic throughout. The photographs are well executed and the acting all that is required in a piece of this kind. Melodrama such as "Cab Number 519" does not call for much subtlety of dramatic interpretation; plain, decisive and incisive. That is what we get in this story. The film is of the best of its kind. Holmes works on very slender materials; he also works rationally and naturally. There is no straining after effect, and so the impression on the

minds of the audience is a logical series of incidents leading up to the conventional defeat of villainy and the triumph of virtue. And when a story worked out on these lines holds the interest of its audience from end to end, then be sure it will receive the stamp of popular approval."⁴

"The Gray Dame" - (Great Northern) - "In taking up the strong vein of detective romances with which the name of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is associated with, the Great Northern Film Company show considerable shrewdness, for the doings of Sherlock Holmes and his miraculous success in unraveling apparently insoluble mysteries appear to have struck the imagination of the world, and especially the juveniles, for all time. Mention Sherlock Holmes and the mind instantly conjures up murder, mystery, confusion and finally happiness, due to the master mind of Baker street, London. We know Baker street, London. It is the home of many modern curiosities of intellect and Doyle wisely choose it as the home of his star detective. But to the splendid story illustrated in the latest Great Northern film: There is a legend in a noble English family, that when the Gray Dame, a respectable family ghost appears, then the eldest son of the house dies. This paves the way for an ingenious plot on the part of a visitor, who sees, it is to be supposed, early possession of the title and estate by the removal of father and son. Well, the Gray Dame appears, the lady of course being the conspirator dressed up for the occasion. In this manor the death of the old lord is assured. Then the son is similarly attacked by this Gray Dame, who has discovered secret doors in the castle. In this dilemma, Sherlock Holmes is sent for, and he also discovers the secret doors. But in doing so he discovers too much, for the Gray Dame outwits Mr. Holmes, and at a very critical moment precipitates the detective into a subterranean dungeon, where presumably he is to rot to death. The resourceful Holmes, however, gets busy on the walls, discovers a secret door which opens, and so regains entrance to the castle. Disguising himself as the son of the house he awaits the next appearance of the Gray Dame, who is considerably surprised when paying her visit, to be attacked, held and unmasked by Holmes and the servants. The culprit is presumably marched off to prison and happiness is restored to the castle. The story is full of exciting movements, and the plot is worked out with decision and sureness of attack. There is not a lingering moment in the story, which moves rapidly, tensely and convincingly, as all detective stories should. Above all it is exceedingly well acted and then it has been very nicely set and mounted. The furniture of the castle, the uniforms, the carriages and the horses, everything, in fact, are provided to give the romance an aspect of verisimilitude. Yet again, as we watched this picture, which is a very fine piece of photographic work, we found our unemotional

⁴ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 4 Jan. - Jun. 1909 pg. 755

selves being carried away by the excitement of the story. And later when we told a small boy of nine what we had seen, he clapped his hands and said, "Oh, I wish I could see that picture." We have no doubt a similar reception awaits this latest great Northern success at the hands of the public."⁵

1909 - "A Squeedunk Sherlock Holmes" - Actors unknown. Edison Mfg. Co.



⁵ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 5 Jul. - Dec. 1909 pg. 344

Edison Films Ad - Released July 9, 1909 - "A Squeedunk Sherlock Holmes" - "A laughable film, showing how a country constable, with the instincts of a true Sherlock Holmes, followed up an imaginary crime. A realistic travesty on the ambitions of the typical country constable."⁶ Length approx. 500 ft.

"A Squeedunk Sherlock Holmes" - "The Edison people have given a good burlesque of the average detective story in a film which has the photographic quality of their recent work. It is unquestionably a good a comedy as they have turned out in a long time, and the audience shows its appreciation in hearty laughter. The acting is quite in keeping with the subject and it is has smooth and even as the Edison actors usually are. As a welcome break from the far too frequent monotony of gloom and death this film is a decided success. It deserves a long run."⁷

1909 - "The Latest Triumph of Sherlock Holmes" (France)- Actors unknown. Gaumont.

"The film treated Holmes' *idiosyncrasies* with a light and satiric touch, depicting him crawling about on the floor with a magnifying glass and tape measure in search of clues. Holmes finally traces the thief in question by means of a discarded cigarette butt."⁸

1909 - "Detective Barock Holmes and His Hound" (France)- Actors unknown. Gaumont.

1909 - "Il piccolo Sherlock Holmes"(Italy) or, **"A Little Sherlock Holmes"**- Actors unknown. Itala Films.

1909 - "Amateur Detektiv ala Nacheiferer Sherlock Holmes" (Germany) or, **"Amateur Detective Emulating Sherlock Holmes"**- Actors unknown. k. Ang. Films?

⁶ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 5 Jul. - Dec. 1909 pg.60

⁷ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 5 Jul. - Dec. 1909 pg.89

⁸ Pohle & Hart, "Sherlock Holmes on Screen" , 1977 pg. 46

The year 1909 also saw the beginning of the Sheerluck Finch series of comedies parodying Sherlock Holmes. Sheerluck Finch was forever tracking down Three Fingered Kate.⁹

1909 - "The Exploits Of Three Fingered Kate" - Charles Calvert as Sheerluck Finch. Cosmos Pictures (U.K.).

1909 - "Three Fingered Kate, Her Second Victim" - Charles Calvert as Sheerluck Finch. Cosmos Pictures (U.K.).

End of Part Two
1910 Starts in Part Three

⁹ Kelley, Gordon E., "Sherlock Holmes Screen and Sound Guide", 1994 pg. 4