

## THE GREEK INTERPRETER by Arthur Conan Doyle

Sist oppdatert: 15. november 2003

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### Part 1 Holmes and Watson visit Mycroft



During my long and intimate acquaintance with Mr. Sherlock Holmes I had never heard him refer to his relations, and hardly ever to his own early life. This reticence upon his part had increased the somewhat inhuman effect which he produced upon me, until sometimes I found myself regarding him as an isolated phenomenon, a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was preeminent in intelligence. His aversion to women and his disinclination to form new

friendships were both typical of his unemotional character, but not more so than his complete suppression of every reference to his own people. I had come to believe that he was an orphan with no relatives living; but one day, to my very great surprise, he began to talk to me about his brother.

It was after tea on a summer evening, and the conversation, which had roamed in a desultory, spasmodic fashion from golf clubs to the causes of the change in the obliquity of the ecliptic, came round at last to the question of atavism and hereditary aptitudes. The point under discussion was, how far any singular gift in an individual was due to his ancestry and how far to his own early training.

“In your own case,” said I, “from all that you have told me, it seems obvious that your faculty of observation and your peculiar facility for deduction are due to your own systematic training.”

“To some extent,” he answered thoughtfully. “My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led much the same life as is natural to their class. But, none the less, my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vemet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms.”

“But how do you know that it is hereditary?”

“Because my brother Mycroft possesses it in a larger degree than I do.”

This was news to me indeed. If there were another man with such singular powers in England, how was it that neither police nor public had heard of him? I put the question, with a hint that it was my companion’s modesty which made him acknowledge his brother as his superior. Holmes laughed at my suggestion.



“My dear Watson,” said he, “I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one’s self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one’s own powers. When I say, therefore, that Mycroft has better powers of observation than I, you may take it that I am speaking the exact and literal truth.”

“Is he your junior?”

“Seven years my senior.”

“How comes it that he is unknown?”, “Oh, he is very well known in his own circle.”

“Where, then?”

“Well, in the Diogenes Club, for example.”

I had never heard of the institution, and my face must have proclaimed as much, for Sherlock Holmes pulled out his watch.

“The Diogenes Club is the queerest club in London, and Mycroft one of the queerest men. He’s always there from quarter to five to twenty to eight. It’s

six now, so if you care for a stroll this beautiful evening I shall be very happy to introduce you to two curiosities.”

Five minutes later we were in the street, walking towards Regent’s Circus. “You wonder,” said my companion, “why it is that Mycroft does not use his powers for detective work. He is incapable of it”

“But I thought you said—“

“I said that he was my superior in observation and deduction. If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an armchair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right. Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one. And yet he was absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case could be laid before a judge or jury.”

“It is not his profession, then?”

“By no means. What is to me a means of livelihood is to him the merest hobby of a dilettante. He has an extraordinary faculty for figures, and audits the books in some of the government departments. Mycroft lodges in Pall Mall, and he walks round the corner into Whitehall every morning and back every evening. From year's end to year's end he takes no other exercise, and is seen nowhere else, except only in the Diogenes Club, which is just opposite his rooms.”

“I cannot recall the name.”

“Very likely not. There are many men in London, you know, who, some from shyness, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the company of their fellows. Yet they are not averse to comfortable chairs and the latest periodicals. It is for the convenience of these that the Diogenes Club was started, and it now contains the most unsociable and unclubable men in town. No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one. Save in the Stranger's Room, no talking is, under any circumstances, allowed, and three offences, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker liable to expulsion. My brother was one of the founders, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere.”

We had reached Pall Mall as we talked, and were walking down it from the St. James’s end. Sherlock Holmes stopped at a door some little distance from

the Carlton, and, cautioning me not to speak, he led the way into the hall. Through the glass panelling I caught a glimpse of a large and luxurious room, in which a considerable number of men were sitting about and reading papers, each in his own little nook. Holmes showed me into a small chamber which looked out into Pall Mall and then, leaving me for a minute, he came back with a companion whom I knew could only be his brother.

Mycroft Holmes was a much larger and stouter man than Sherlock. His body was absolutely corpulent, but his face, though massive, had preserved something of the sharpness of expression which was so remarkable in that of his brother. His eyes, which were of a peculiarly light, watery gray, seemed to always retain that faraway, introspective look which I had only observed in Sherlock's when he was exerting his full powers.

"I am glad to meet you, sir," said he, putting out a broad, fat hand like the flipper of a seal. "I hear of Sherlock everywhere since you became his chronicler. By the way, Sherlock, I expected to see you round last week to consult me over that Manor House case. I thought you might be a little out of your depth." "No, I solved it," said my friend, smiling. "It was Adams, of course." "Yes, it was Adams."

"I was sure of it from the first." The two sat down together in the bow-window of the club. "To anyone who wishes to study mankind this is the spot," said Mycroft. "Look at the magnificent types! Look at these two men who are coming towards us, for example." "The billiard-marker and the other?" "Precisely. What do you make of the other?"

The two men had stopped opposite the window. Some chalk marks over the waistcoat pocket were the only signs of billiards which I could see in one of them. The other was a very small, dark fellow, with his hat pushed back and several packages under his arm. "An old soldier, I perceive," said Sherlock.

"And very recently discharged," remarked the brother. "Served in India, I see." "And a non-commissioned officer." "Royal Artillery, I fancy," said Sherlock. "And a widower." "But with a child." "Children, my dear boy, children." "Come," said I, laughing, "this is a little too much."

"Surely," answered Holmes, "it is not hard to say that a man with that bearing, expression of authority, and sunbaked skin, is a soldier, is more than a private, and is not long from India."

"That he has not left the service long is shown by his still wearing his ammunition boots, as they are called," observed Mycroft.

“He had not the cavalry stride, yet he wore his hat on one side, as is shown by the lighter skin on that side of his brow. His weight is against his being a sapper. He is in the artillery.”

“Then, of course, his complete mourning shows that he has lost someone very dear. The fact that he is doing his own shopping looks as though it were his wife. He has been buying things for children, you perceive. There is a rattle, which shows that one of them is very young. The wife probably died in childbed. The fact that he has a picture-book under his arm shows that there is another child to be thought of.”

I began to understand what my friend meant when he said that his brother possessed even keener faculties than he did himself. He glanced across at me and smiled. Mycroft took snuff from a tortoiseshell box and brushed away the wandering grains from his coat front with a large, red silk handkerchief.

“By the way, Sherlock,” said he, “I have had something quite after your own heart, a most singular problem—submitted to my judgment. I really had not the energy to follow it up save in a very incomplete fashion, but it gave me a basis for some pleasing speculations. If you would care to hear the facts—“

“My dear Mycroft, I should be delighted.”

The brother scribbled a note upon a leaf of his pocket-book, and, ringing the bell, he handed it to the waiter.

“I have asked Mr. Melas to step across,” said he. “He lodges on the floor above me, and I have some slight acquaintance with him, which led him to come to me in his perplexity. Mr. Melas is a Greek by extraction, as I understand, and he is a remarkable linguist. He earns his living partly as interpreter in the law courts and partly by acting as guide to any wealthy Orientals who may visit the Northumberland Avenue hotels. I think I will leave him to tell his very remarkable experience in his own fashion.”

## Dictionary

<i>acknowledge</i>	anerkjenne, godta
<i>acquaintance</i>	bekjentskap
<i>ancestry, ancestors</i>	forgjengere,
<i>atavism</i>	det at en form eller egenskap fra besteforeldre eller eldre slektninger dukker opp igjen i et individ
<i>audit</i>	det å føre og gjennomgå regnskap
<i>averse, aversion</i>	mislike noe så sterkt at man forsøker å unngå det
<i>convenience</i>	beleilighet, noe som passer godt inn

<i>corpulent</i>	tykk (korpulent)
<i>country squires</i>	engelske land- og godseiere
<i>deficient</i>	manglende, noe som har en svakhet
<i>desultory</i>	som mangler fasthet og regelmessighet
<i>dilettante</i>	dilettant, en som tror han vet mer enn han vet
<i>discharge</i>	løslate, frigi
<i>disinclination</i>	det ikke å ha en hang til noe
<i>exert</i>	iverksette, utføre, fremlegge
<i>expulsion</i>	drive ut noe, fjerne
<i>extraction</i>	trekke noe ut
<i>facility for deduction</i>	god til å trekke slutninger
<i>faculty of observation</i>	observasjonsevne
<i>hereditary aptitudes</i>	nedarvet god forstand
<i>his own people</i>	hans egen slekt
<i>introspective</i>	det å skue inn i seg selv
<i>liable</i>	ha en tendens til
<i>linguist</i>	lingvist, en som forsker på språk
<i>livelihood</i>	å tjene til livets opphold, livsutkomme
<i>lodges</i>	bor, holder til
<i>misanthropy</i>	det å ha et pessimistisk og negativt menneskebilde
<i>modesty</i>	beskjedenhet
<i>mourning</i>	sorg
<i>non-commissioned</i>	her: en som ikke lenger er i militær tjeneste
<i>nook</i>	bortgjemt krok eller hjørne
<i>obliquity of the ecliptic</i>	skrånende vinkel mellom jordens ekvatorlinje og den himmelbane jorden følger rundt solen, en vinkel som blir noen centimeter mindre for hvert år som går
<i>offence</i>	forbrytelse, dårlig handling
<i>orphan</i>	foreldreløst barn
<i>peculiar</i>	bemerkelsesverdig, spesiell
<i>periodicals</i>	tidsskrifter
<i>perplexity</i>	forundring, forbløffelse
<i>phenomenon</i>	fenomen, hendelse
<i>preeminent</i>	suveren, over alle andre
<i>proclaimed</i>	her: uttrykt
<i>queer</i>	annerledes, avvikende
<i>rank</i>	stilling, rang
<i>rattle</i>	skrangle (leketøy for små barn)
<i>retain</i>	opprettholde
<i>reticence</i>	taushet, det å holde noe tilbake
<i>roamed</i>	vandre rundt uten mål og mening
<i>sapper</i>	militær som graver skyttergraver : militær som undergraver fiendens stillinger
<i>snuff</i>	en dose pulvertobakk til å sniffes

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<i>soothing</i>	lindrende
<i>spasmodic</i>	plutselige og uforutsigelige bevegelser
<i>stroll</i>	tur (som i uttrykket "gå på tur")
<i>suppression</i>	undertrykkelse
<i>tortoiseshell</i>	skjell av skilpadde
<i>underestimate</i>	undervurdere
<i>veins</i>	blodårer
<i>virtue</i>	dyd, gode egenskaper
<i>waistcoat</i>	vest (plagget)
<i>widower</i>	enkemann

**Exercises****A. Enlargen your vocabulary**

Find 5 words in the chapter which you don't understand and look them up in a dictionary. Then write their meaning down and translate the sentences in which you found them into Norwegian.

English word	Translation into Norwegian

Translation of the sentences in which the word occurs

**B. Answer these questions**

- 1. Why was Doctor Watson surprised when Sherlock told him about Mycroft, his brother?**

- 2. Describe Sherlock Holmes as you see him.**

**3. Why did Sherlock say that his deduction abilities were hereditary?**

**4. Why did Holmes not see modesty as a virtue?**

**5. What was the difference in age between Sherlock and Mycroft and who was the older of the two?**

**6. Why was Mycroft incapable of detective work?**

**7. What kind of club was the Diogenes club?**

**8. How were Sherlock and Mycroft different in appearance and what was similar in their looks?**

**9. Who was Mr. Melas?**

**C. Verbs**

**Conjugate (bøy) the verbs in the brackets to fit the sentences**

Watson (to think) \_\_\_\_\_ Holmes (to be) \_\_\_\_\_ an orphan, so when he (to hear) \_\_\_\_\_ of his brother Mycroft, he (to be) \_\_\_\_\_ much (to surprise) \_\_\_\_\_. He was even more surprised when he (to listen) \_\_\_\_\_ to a conversation between the two brothers. Mycroft (to seem) \_\_\_\_\_ to have the same capability of deduction as Sherlock, even though he (to lack) \_\_\_\_\_ the enthusiasm of his younger brother. Mycroft (to tell) \_\_\_\_\_ them a man (to call) \_\_\_\_\_ Mr. Melas had (to speak) \_\_\_\_\_ to him.

**D. Fill in the gaps using the following words**

*circumstances - founders - comfortable - liable - shyness - permitted - Diogenes - company - men - unsociable*

“There are many \_\_\_\_\_ in London, you know, who, some from \_\_\_\_\_, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the \_\_\_\_\_ of their fellows. Yet they are not averse to \_\_\_\_\_ chairs and the latest periodicals. It is for the convenience of these that the \_\_\_\_\_ Club was started, and it now contains the most \_\_\_\_\_ and unclubable men in town. No member is \_\_\_\_\_ to take the least notice of any other one. Save in the Stranger’s Room, no talking is, under any \_\_\_\_\_, allowed, and three offences, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker \_\_\_\_\_ to expulsion. My brother was one of the \_\_\_\_\_, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere.”

## Answers

A.

*[Do-it-yourself-task]*

B.

1. **Why was Doctor Watson surprised when Sherlock told him about Mycroft, his brother?**

*He had never heard him refer to his relations, and hardly ever to his own early life and had come to believe that he was an orphan with no relatives living.*

2. **Describe Sherlock Holmes as you see him.**

*[Fill in your own description]*

3. **Why did Sherlock say that his deduction abilities were hereditary?**

*Because he said his brother Mycroft possessed it in a larger degree than he did himself.*

4. **Why did Holmes not see modesty as a virtue?**

*Because to the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one's self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one's own powers.*

5. **What was the difference in age between Sherlock and Mycroft and who was the older of the two?**

*Mycroft was seven years older than Sherlock.*

6. **Why was Mycroft incapable of detective work?**

*Because he had no ambition and no energy. He would not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right.*

7. **What kind of club was the Diogenes club?**

*It was a club for those who either out of shyness or misanthropy, had no wish for the company of their fellows.*

8. **How were Sherlock and Mycroft different in appearance and what was similar in their looks?**

*Mycroft Holmes was a much larger and stouter man than Sherlock. His body was corpulent, but his face, though massive, had preserved something of the sharpness of expression which was so remarkable in*

*that of his brother, His eyes, which were of a peculiarly light, watery gray, seemed to always retain that faraway, introspective look which Watson had only observed in Sherlock's when he was exerting his full powers.*

**9. Who was Mr. Melas?**

*He was of Greek origin and an expert linguist. He worked as a translator.*

**C.**

*Watson (to think) thought Holmes (to be) was an orphan, so when he (to hear) heard of his brother Mycroft, he (to be) was much (to surprise) surprised. He was even more surprised when he (to listen) listened to the conversation between the two brothers. Mycroft (to seem) seemed to have the same capability of deduction as Sherlock, even though he (to lack) lacked the enthusiasm of his younger brother. Mycroft (to tell) told them a man (to call) called Mr. Melas had (to speak) spoken to him.*

**D.**

*“There are many men in London, you know, who, some from shyness, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the company of their fellows. Yet they are not averse to comfortable chairs and the latest periodicals. It is for the convenience of these that the Diogenes Club was started, and it now contains the most unsociable and unclubable men in town. No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one. Save in the Stranger's Room, no talking is, under any circumstances, allowed, and three offences, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker liable to expulsion. My brother was one of the founders, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere.”*

## *Philosophical explorations*

1. *In the beginning Holmes and Watson discuss the question of heredity versus environment. Watson suggests that Holmes' remarkable powers of observation and deduction are due to Holmes' own systematic training and exercise. Holmes does not agree and claims instead that it is "in his veins, and may have come with my grandmother".*

*Who is right? Sometimes it is easy to say if a particular gift is from heritage or is due to training and upbringing—for example a beautiful face. No one will claim that a beautiful face is due to the environment (although a good environment can help to maintain and nourish a beautiful face). But what about a beautiful handwriting, or an inclination to do good and beautiful things to other people?*

2. *A little later in the discussion, when Sherlock tells that his brother Mycroft has even more developed powers of observation than himself, Watson thinks that Sherlock is being modest. This Sherlock refuses saying:*

*"I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one's self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one's own powers."*

*Is modesty a virtue? If you get excellent marks on a test, should you tell it to your friends or not? Why?*

*Holmes rejects both modesty and the opposite because a logician always sees things "exactly as they are". But what does it actually mean to see things exactly as they are? If you go to the concert hall and listen to a symphony of Beethoven, what exactly is it you have been listening to? Or if you are terribly let down by someone you love very much, what exactly goes on in your head then? Is everything in the world logical? Can Sherlock understand everything just because he's so good with logics?*

3. *The Diogenes club was a society of men who didn't like the society of men. Isn't that a bit strange? Would you have joined a football club if you hated football, or a chess club if you hated chess? Of course, you go to school every day although you probably often don't want to. But you are bound to go to school – these men didn't have to join the Diogenes club. Then why did they*

*do it if they really disliked the company of other men?*

*Suppose you're terribly afraid of heights. But every once in a while when, you climb a ladder, you must always look down! Then you become dizzy, and you knew you would, but still you had to look down. Why is that?*

*Suppose you love listening to music on your stereo at home. So you spend all your available time doing this, day in day out. One day you go to a concert. The sound and performance of the band is not so good, but still you have a wonderful musical experience. Why is that?*

*Do these three cases – the men in the club, you on the ladder and you on the concert – have anything in common? What are the differences between the cases?*

4. *When Holmes and Watson finally meet Mycroft, they go about analysing the appearance of a complete stranger that passes by. They study him carefully, observing every little detail in his clothing, his luggage, his manners etc. From this clever observation they manage to deduce remarkable amounts of information about this person. Apparently they get to know everything about his past and present just by having a quick look at him.*

*Can everybody develop such powers of observation that Holmes and Mycroft possess or is it something that is peculiar to some people? Is it ethically correct to observe other people and draw conclusions about their lives like that? Are Holmes and Mycroft really interested in what they observe or are they more interested in the observation itself? Is it perhaps possible to say that Watson is the most splendid observer of them all – since he is the one observing the observers?*