

AFTERWORD

Why another story featuring Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde?

Joseph M. Stoddart, Managing Editor of the American publication 'Lippencott's Monthly Magazine' came to our shores on a scouting mission to find new talent. He invited Doyle and Wilde to meet him at the Langham Hotel, in London, on 30th August 1889. Doyle had been invited on the strength of his 1887 Sherlock Holmes story 'A Study in Scarlet'. (He had also had a historical novel published, a genre he would also continue to pursue.) As for Oscar Wilde, he was coming to the end of his tenure as a magazine editor. He had hoped to initiate sweeping changes to promote the emancipation of women, but his efforts had been blocked at every turn. He also had other writing credits under his belt. Their extraordinary meeting, the outcome of which established their literary careers and ensured Doyle didn't abandon Sherlock Holmes after just one outing, is worthy of a second treatment.

	
<p>Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – 1897 Artist: Sidney Paget Collection: Sherlock Holmes Museum at Lucens, Switzerland courtesy of Conan Doyle Estate Ltd Photograph: Jean Upton - Sherlock Holmes Society London</p>	<p>Oscar Wilde – 1881 Photography studio: Elliott & Fry Collection: National Portrait Gallery, London</p>

Oscar Wilde died on 30th November 1900. (David Parr and Oscar Wilde were both born in 1854.) Rather appropriately, given that the David Parr House celebrates surface decoration, Wilde's last noted quip was, **'My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One of us has got to go'**.

The author **Richard Le Gallienne was inspired by Oscar Wilde to pursue a career as a writer.** He first saw his hero on 10th December 1883 giving a lecture on 'Personal Impressions of America and Her People' at the Cloughton Music Hall in Birkenhead. Le Gallienne's biographer

wrote, 'A vast crowd of the citizens of Birkenhead thronged the hall to see in the flesh this disconcerting young man who, after first outraging it, had then appointed himself the keeper of the nation's aesthetic conscience. There was an excited buzz and flutter as a tall, strong, athletic young giant strode on to the platform. His audience was somewhat disappointed to find that the much-publicised velvet suit, knee-breeches and 'long, essence hair' were not in evidence, but in Oscar's faultless suit of evening-dress there were decided touches! His black tie was of a curious cut and, from between his waistcoat and the bosom of his shirt, he allowed a salmon-coloured silk handkerchief to peep with coyly studied negligence. From time to time he pretended to make use of another silk handkerchief which he extracted with a willowy, undulant gesture from his trouser-pocket. His delivery was self-possessed and deliberate and he used no notes. He affected a Weltschmerz and languor which seemed strangely at variance with his massive physique. For more than an hour he held forth upon art, dress and education, occasionally making concessions to the advertised title of his address by mentioning the Americans, whom he seemed disposed to admire...'

In the spring of 1889, the same year that Wilde's literary fortunes would change, Le Gallienne would be given an invitation to Wilde's Tite Street home. 'My night with Oscar was very happy and cheering, he was very hearty to me and spoke of my work and my chances in a very inspiring way. He thinks that my position with W. B. should prove the making of me...'

By 1928, Le Gallienne was living in Paris. His biographer writes, 'In the afternoon Richard and Irma might ramble together in the Bois de Boulogne or wander through the lesser-known out-of-the-way streets. It was in the course of one of these afternoon saunters that Richard acquired one of his most treasured possessions.'

Le Gallienne wrote, 'Immediately on our left opened out a short broad street, the Rue des Beaux-Arts, and there we noticed a small crowd in front of a small shabby-genteel hotel. The interest evidently centred on some workmen on ladders engaged in hoisting something white up against the façade of the hotel. We walked over to see what was going on. The something they were hoisting up was one of those plaques with which the French People, with gracious intelligence, dignify against oblivion the houses where famous men and women have lived and died. The name of the hotel, we observed, was the Hôtel d'Alsace, and the name of the plaque was Oscar Wilde... 'The following day we called at the Hôtel d'Alsace and talked to the landlord and his wife, pleasant Normandy folk with two beautiful daughters. They were immensely interested in the story of Wilde, and proud of their plague, and readily agreed to show us his rooms... Naturally, we entered the rooms with a queer, painful feeling. 'There were two rooms, first the bedroom where he had died.... Without our saying anything, the landlord evidently divined our thoughts... No, he had not died in that bed. All the furniture had been changed. Somehow this relieved our oppression, and when we entered the sitting-room beyond a comely room... In the bay window stood a table and on this the landlady, who was the spokesman laid her hand... And there were many other inspiring memories which may well have companioned the sad heart of the poet, whose last writing desk was that little table... and, without doubt, the reader has already guessed that that is the table my friends ask me about when they pay a visit to my garret.'

	
<p style="text-align: center;">Charles Augustus Howell Image: Baker Street firm of Elliot & Fry Collection: National Portrait Gallery, London</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Charles Augustus Howell - 1870 Illustration: Dante Gabriel Rossetti Collection: V&A Museum, London</p>

Charles Augustus Howell featured in April's 'Afterword'. He inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story 'Charles Augustus Milverton' and was the basis of the character 'de Castro' in Theodore Watts-Dunton's novel 'Aylwin'.

The day after Howell's death W. Graham Robertson received a telegram from the actress Ellen Terry which read: **'Howell is *really* dead this time, do go to Christie's and see what turns up'**.

Ellen Terry wasn't the only person to be set into a panic. As will be revealed, there was a stampede to attend the sale of his effects as many suspected Howell of having stolen confidential letters, possibly for the purposes of blackmail, and of forging works of art.

Howell was John Ruskin's secretary between 1856 – 1868, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's man of business between 1872 – 1876, and that of James McNeill Whistler.

Dr G. G. Williamson relates in his (1919) 'Tribute of Regard', entitled 'Murray Marks And His Friends', that Rossetti initially spoke well of Howell, describing him as 'a man of unusual personal charm and business capacity' and as 'a wonder salesman, with his open manner, winning address, and his exhaustless gift of amusing talk not innocent of high colouring and actual blague'. Rossetti, who was a bad sleeper and often sat up late, was glad of Howell's clever and exhaustless conversation, calling him 'the great romancer of his age, unless it be old Dumas'.

Theodore Watts-Dunton described his character 'de Castro' as a 'professional anecdote-monger of extraordinary brilliancy', a 'raconteur of the very first order' and a 'liar'.

Williamson comments, 'If he had been no more than an able raconteur, and a man of extraordinary brilliance, he would have continued on terms of friendship with many of the notable artists with whom for a while he certainly was intimate, but it must be plainly said, although one is anxious not to do less than justice to a man who has passed away, that in characterizing de Castro as a liar, Watts-Dunton was simply using words which John Ruskin's mother had years ago applied to him.' John Ruskin's mother had declared him to be one of the biggest liars she had ever come across.

Whistler's biographers, Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell, commented, 'Whistler's talk of Howell and Tudor House overflowed with anecdotes of the adventurer, for whom he retained a tender regret, and the groups gathered about Rossetti. He accounted for Howell's downfall by a last stroke of inventiveness when he procured rare and priceless black pots for a patron who later discovered rows of the same pots in an Oxford Street shop.'

Theodore Watts-Dunton's biographers, Compton-Rickett and Thomas Hake, wrote, '[Charles Augustus Howell] ...afforded Whistler a chance of weaving anecdotes without end; for the quaint and curious stories about Howell, as told by Jimmy 'would set many a Whistler breakfast table in a roar. The favourite breakfast yarns were of Howell's remarkable power of convincing the uncultured nouveaux riches of his expert knowledge in recognising the works of old masters, and how he would succeed in palming off upon these millionaires, 'masterpieces' of Michael Angelo, Titian, and especially those of Holbein; and when one of these wealthy 'art collectors' would chance to shuffle off this mortal coil and his effects were sold at Christie's, the 'old masters' were knocked down, amidst ironical laughter, at something below the original cost of their gilded frames. It was a situation that Sheridan would have appreciated as suggestive of a scene in a society play.

On one occasion, as Whistler would state in his best style, being a guest at one of these rich men's tables, and happening to express slight dubiety as to the genuineness of some of the 'old masters' with which the dining-room walls had been covered by Howell, was never again invited to the 'connoisseur's' house.'

'On more than one occasion Howell's death was reported, it is believed by his own agency, in order that he might hear what was to be said, and also in order to assist in a negotiation he had with the underground railway people whom he sued for having damages by reason of injuries caused him.'

Howell died on 24th April 1890. His effects were sold over three days at Christies' (13th, 14th and 15th November 1890). Seemingly, 'great surprise was expressed by the various persons concerned who had known Howell at the large number of fine things he had been able to acquire'. Amongst the many lots sold was 'an important collection of Stuart relics, which really belonged to his only daughter and to which she had succeeded from her mother, who was a Murray of Stanhope.' His daughter was first in line to inherit the proceeds from the sale, but it was divided between his creditors.



Whistler had won his suit against John Ruskin but it resulted in his bankruptcy. The Pennells noted, 'Along with the bailiffs Whistler's friend Howell descended upon Tite Street at the smell of blood to help smuggle works of art out of the house without detection. The painting of [Rosa] Corder was the first to go. It was not until a decade later, when Howell died, that the true extent of his business cunning would be revealed.'

The Pennells return to this theme, saying, 'Rossetti met Ellen Terry's representative, W. Graham Robertson, in the auction room' and 'As lot by lot went under the hammer, Whistler sat placidly identifying many of the pictures. One of the paintings to appear was the portrait of Rosa Corder along with numerous other pictures he had kept for 'safekeeping' during Whistler's bankruptcy'.

Left: Portrait of Rosa Corder:
Arrangement in Brown and Black - 1876 - 1878
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Frick Collection

David B Elliot, wrote in his 'Charles Fairfax Murray: The Unknown Pre-Raphaelite', 'There were many other services, small and large, freely given to old friends over the years... 'He [Edward Burne-Jones] relied once more on Fairfax Murray's discretion when Charles Augustus Howell's estate came to auction. Nobody cared to think of the past relationships, alliances and reproaches that might be exposed by private letters written 25 years earlier; and it was generally believed that 'the Owl' had collected tales from the gossip Rossetti circle for future use, by whatever means came to hand; in particular, he was thought to have letters relating to Burne-Jones's passionate affair with Maria Zambaco.'

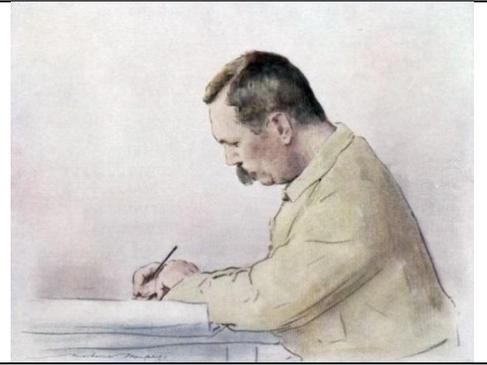


Right, top: Maria Theresa Zambaco - 1870
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Collection: Private – Public domain



Right, bottom: Maria Theresa Zambaco – c. 1870
Edward Burne-Jones
Collection: not known - Public domain

There's a wonderful photo of Frederick Leach (David Parr's employer) and his assembled workers taken, in 1882, on a day out to Clayhithe. The men are arranged in rows, like a collegiate photo. One man stands out from all the others because of his physique and his hat. The man is tall, has a Holmesian quality, and, most importantly, is the only one wearing a deerstalker. The wearer is none other than David Parr.



Incredibly, both David Parr and Sherlock Holmes were born in 1854. David Parr was born on 19th July 1854 and in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story 'His Last Bow', set in 1914, Sherlock Holmes is described as sixty years of age - his birthday is 6th January.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle - Before 1930
Mortimer Menpes
Image: Public Domain

Having established this tenuous connection, by playing 'Six Degrees of Separation', David Parr can be linked to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in less than six connections. (Six degrees of separation is the idea that all people are six, or fewer, social connections away from each other.)

Mortimer Menpes (1860-1938) was an Australian-born painter, author, printmaker and illustrator. During a sketching tour of Brittany, in 1880, he met James McNeill Whistler. He became Whistler's pupil, and at one stage shared a flat with him at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. He was taught etching by Whistler and became a major figure in the etching revival, producing more than seven hundred different etchings and drypoints. As early as 1880, a selection of ten of his drypoint portraits, donated to the British Museum by **Charles Augustus Howell**, brought him critical acclaim.

(Despite all the terrible things Charles August Howell did, he was capable of acts of kindness. Nevertheless, one is left wondering how he came by the portraits and what motivation lay behind his donation.)

In 1900, after the outbreak of the Second Boer War (1899–1902), Menpes was sent to South Africa as a war artist for an illustrated weekly magazine. Doyle served as a volunteer doctor in the Langman Field Hospital at Bloemfontein between March and June 1900. Did Menpes meet Doyle in South Africa and is that where he produced his picture of the author - see above? Doyle does appear to be in uniform.

In 1886, Menpes agreed to stand as godfather to his friend Oscar Wilde's second son Vyvyan.

If Oscar Wilde and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle hadn't met at the Langham Hotel on 30th August 1889, David Parr could still be linked to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle via Oscar Wilde and an extra degree of separation.

David Parr > William Morris > Oscar Wilde > Mortimer Menpes > Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



The Arming and Departure of the Knights

The Failure of Sir Gawaine

John Henry Dearle, Sir Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

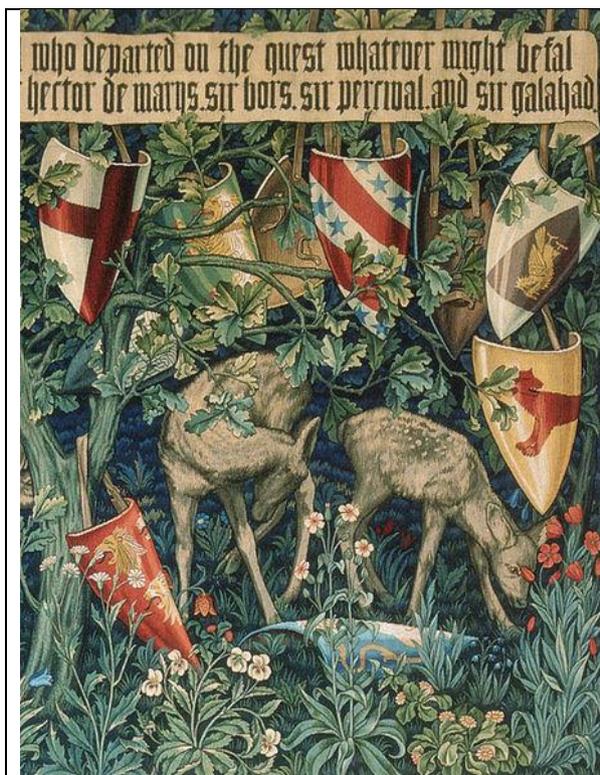
One of the last commissions William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones worked on together were the 'Holy Grail Tapestries'. The theme of the series of tapestries chimed with their taste in literature and art and interest in arms and armour since they were students in Oxford.

J. W. Mackail wrote in his (1901) biography of William Morris, under 1853, Morris's rooms were full of rubbings which he had taken from medieval brasses. But the great pictorial art of Italy and Flanders was as yet unknown to either. "Of painting," writes Sir Edward Burne-Jones, "we knew nothing. It was before the time when photographs made all the galleries of Europe accessible, and what would have been better a thousand times for us, the wall paintings of Italy. Indeed it would be difficult to make any one understand the dearth of things dear to us in which we lived; and matters that are well known to cultivated people, and common places in talk, were then impossible for us to know." Giotto, Angelico, Van Eyck, Dürer, names which little later became of capital importance to Morris, were then wholly unknown to him... The reproductions of the Arundel Society were just beginning to be issued; but at present all that he knew of Pre-Raphaelite Italian art was from one or two pictures in the Taylorian Museum, and the rude woodcuts in Ruskin's Handbook to the Arena Chapel in Padua... Among the most immediately stimulating of the books which he and Burne-Jones fell in with at Oxford was a translation of Fouqué's 'Sintram,' prefixed to which was a woodcut copy of **Dürer's engraving of the Knight and Death**. Poorly, executed as it was, this fired their imagination, and hours were spent pouring over it.'

'[1855] During this visit to Birmingham Burne-Jones took Morris to Cornish's, the bookseller's shop in New Street, where, in accordance with the leisurely eighteenth century practice that still lingered in provincial towns, customers were allowed to drop in and read books from the shelves. There Burne-Jones had passed "hundreds of hours" in this employment; there lately he had found and begun to read a copy of Southey's edition of Malory's "Morte d'Arthur", a work till then unknown to either of the two, and one which Burne-Jones could not afford to buy. Morris bought it at first sight, and it at once became one of their most precious treasures: so precious that even among their intimates there was a shyness over it, till a year later they heard Rossetti speak of it and the Bible as the two greatest books in the world, and their tongues were unloosed by the sanction of his authority.

‘[1856] Topsy [Morris] and I live together,” writes Burne-Jones in August, “in the quaintest room in all London, hung with brasses of old knights and drawings of Albert [Albrecht] Dürer.’

‘[1857] “If we needed models,” Sir Edward Burne-Jones writes, “we sat to each other, and Morris had a head always fit for Lancelot or Tristram. For the purposes of our drawing we often needed armour, and if a date and design so remote that no examples existed for our use. Therefore, Morris, whose knowledge of all these things seemed to have been born in him, and who never at any time needed books of reference for anything, set to work to make designs for an ancient kind of helmet called a basinet, and for a great surcoat of ringed mail with a hood of mail and the skirt coming below the knees. These were made for him by a stout little smith who had a forge near the Castle. Morris’s visit to the forge were daily, but what scenes happened there we shall never know; the encounter between these two workmen were always stubborn and angry as far as I could see. One afternoon when I was working high up at my picture, I heard a strange bellowing in the building, and turning round to find the cause, saw an unwonted sight. The basinet was being tried on, but the visor, for some reason, would not lift, and I saw Morris embedded in iron, dancing with rage and roaring inside. The mail coat came in due time, and was so satisfactory to its designer that the first day it came he chose to dine in it. It became him well; he looked very splendid. When it lay in coils on the ground, one could lift it with great difficulty, but once put on the body its weight was so evenly ordered that it was less uncomfortable than any top coat I ever wore. I have the basinet still, and the sword that was made by the same smith.”



John Henry Dearle, flowers & decoration
 Sir Edward Burne-Jones, overall design
 William Morris, heraldry

Georgiana Burne-Jones wrote in her ‘Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones’ under 1890, ‘He wrote many letters this winter when the weather was too bad for him to get out. In one of these he told Lady Leighton of a book he was reading about the arms borne by the Knights of the Round Table. “I got it from Morris,” he says, “who I think knows everything in the whole world.” Underneath the tapestry pictures of the San Graal he was designing forest-pieces, with shields of the chief knights hanging from the branches of the trees, and he picks out and describes some of them. Arthur’s, of course, comes first: ‘He beareth azure, thirteen crowns of gold; but,” Edward complains, “mostly the noble knights have rather common place arms, and the unknown ones have beautiful ones, which is like the way of this worrying world. Galahad for whom I should have liked to violate heraldry, giving him a gold cup on a silver ground, has to bear a red cross only and is so dull for him... “



Knight, Death and Devil – engraving, 1513
Albrecht Dürer
Rosenwald Collection



Above: artist unknown - 1512/1513
Collection: Pinacoteca Ambrosiana (Mailand)

The following text was provided by
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'The subject of Albrecht Dürer's engraving 'Knight, Death and Devil' (*left*) is not a knight. In German, a knight is a 'Ritter'. However, in German this figure is described as a 'Reiter', not a 'Ritter'. A 'Reiter' in this context is a light-medium cavalryman, as opposed to a fully armed and armoured knight. These are lower-ranking cavalry soldiers, wearing less armour, generally of a lower quality, and not members of the chivalric elite. But, one can see how 'Reiter' might be mistranslated as 'knight'. It's a subtle error, oft repeated, leading to major misinterpretation.

The English title of the famous print should actually be something like *The Light Horseman, Death and the Devil*, or maybe even *The Demi-Lancer, Death and the Devil*. Doesn't glide off the tongue perhaps, but more accurate.

In the 1512/1513 print (*left*), as well as the related earlier 'Reiter' drawing of 1498 (*see following page*), what we see is indeed a light horseman or demi-lancer and not a knight. In this period a knight would have complete, full enclosed head-to-foot plate armour, and so would his horse. The knight would be armed with a long, thick heavy cavalry lance, a short arming sword, and another knightly weapon like an axe or war hammer. His horse would wear full plate armour too. His helmet would be an enclosed armet.



Here we see something totally different - no armour on the horse (lighter, faster), and only partial armour on the man - no plates on the lower legs or feet. Also, the helmet is a typical light horseman's sallet, not an armet. The spear is a demi-lance, lighter than the knightly lance, and he's got a longsword, not an arming sword. This is a completely different class of fighting man. He's a common man - someone many more people, a much wider audience, could relate to. This is why Durer depicted Saint George in the same way - an ordinary person in the military, not an aristocratic knight.

Study of a rider – 1498
Albrecht Dürer
Public domain

The writing on Dürer's 1498 study translates as, 'This was the armour at the time in Germany. 1498'



Above: Gaston de Foix - 1866
Elizabeth Howard, after Titian, after Giorgione
Image: Bonhams

The painting was thought to be a copy of a painting owned by the Earls of Carlisle, which was displayed either at Castle Howard or Naworth Castle. Elizabeth Howard might have been the daughter of George Howard, the 6th Earl of Carlisle.

The current Earl of Carlisle (13th), George Howard, said in the BBC TV programme 'Bought with Love : The Secret History of British Art Collections' (written and presented by Helen Rosslyn), that his favourite painting in his collection was 'Gaston de Foix and his Page', by Titian. He described his pleasure in its details: the soft velvet of the Page's tunic, the light reflected in de Foix's armour and the shared look of concentration.

Castle Howard featured in January's 'Afterword' because **Frederick Leach** was sub-contracted to work on the decorative scheme in the chapel.



Above: Study of Armour : Perseus in 'The Finding of Medusa' – before 1880
Edward Burne-Jones
Collection: Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
Image: wikicommons

Acknowledgements:

Dr Tobias Capwell, Curator of Arms and Armour at the Wallace Collection, London