

# The Litmus Paper

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## Lab Notes♦♦♦

Welcome to the first issue of The Litmus Paper, the official, if somewhat irregularly published, newsletter of St. Bartholomew's Chemical Laboratory.

Many events have taken place since the last notice to all the Lab Assistants. On September 30th, 1988, the local Assistants, thirteen in number, (such a lucky number!) gathered at the Butler home to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the double murders of Jack the Ripper. We discussed our individual interests in the infamous contemporary of Holmes and watched a documentary on a possible solution to the unsolved murders. There was some slight embarrassment during the evening however. A charismatic Bible meeting was going on at the same time just next door to 8015D Holland Court; a few of the members of both Ripper study and Bible study groups got mixed up in each others fields of interest before we got things sorted out. All in all, the property values have not decreased and both groups had a very enjoyable and productive evening.

November 1st, 1988 saw five of the local Assistants at the Broker Restaurant in downtown Denver spending an evening with Peter Blau, B.S.I. and twenty some odd members of his scion, The

Practical, But Limited Geologists. The members of both scions shared a pleasant, if too short, evening renewing old acquaintances and gorging themselves from the Broker's unlimited shrimp bowl appetizers. Peter sends his well wishes to all the local Sherlockians who were unable to make the meeting and assures that, when the National Association of Geologists has their annual convention next in Denver, we will surely get together again.

A few of the Assistants, along with members of the other local scion, Dr. Watson's Neglected Patients, gathered again on Tuesday, November 8th for a preview showing of the new Sherlockian movie, "Without A Clue". A review appears later in the Litmus Paper. From the opinions of those who attended, the movie is a success, at least from the Sherlockian view, which means by Hollywood standards it will be a flop. Those who attended received a free lobby poster of "Without A Clue" to add to their collection. The only drawback to the evening was that it coincided with another minor national event, Election Day, and a few misguided members stayed home to watch the returns rather than catch the movie. Sad, sad, sad.

The latest function was the 135th Birthday celebration of Sherlock Holmes on January 6, 1989. Members of just about every Denver area section attended: The Chem Lab, the Neglected Patients, The Council of Four, Poor Bibliophiles International and even The Pinchen Lane Irregulars. Forty plus Sherlockians gathered at the Denver Press Club for food, drink, a trivia contest, good canonical conversation and a talk about mystery writing by Rex Burns, creator of Denver Police Department's finest, Gabe Wager. After the evening was over, we made plans to have more functions including Patients, Assistants, Poor Bibliophiles, Council members and Irregulars.

Further meetings will be forthcoming in the near future for local Assistants. The exact date is not known, but we will attempt to outguess the very uncertain Colorado weather this time of year and schedule a function soon.

Our best wishes and hopes for a speedy recovery go out to Beverly Towne, who was in the hospital the week of January 9th for heart surgery. If you wish to send her a note or card, her address is 4430 Dover Street, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033.

A note for any and all Assistants: if there is an interest among the ranks, we will start a "Want Ads" column for the use of the members. If you are looking for a particular Sherlockian book or item and have been unable to find it, or have something to sell, please forward your request or announcement to the Litmus Paper and we will publish it in the next issue. That way, you have a better chance of either finding what you seek, or selling your item. Also, should you have

any items of interest you wish to pass along, or an article or story you've written, do not hesitate to send that along.

We will be sending out a membership roster of all the Assistants in the near future as well and updating you as to new members as well in future issues.

We wish all the Assistants a very prosperous, healthy and Canonical New Year.

## Review

Have you ever wondered when, during the course of one of Sherlock Holmes' investigations he receives a telegram or letter, why he makes Dr. Watson read the communication? Could it be that his powers of concentration are clearer having the vital information read to him? Or could it just be that he is simply illiterate? The writers of the latest Sherlockian theatrical release, "Without A Clue", starring Michael Caine and Ben Kingsley, take the latter explanation. Simply put, Watson, the cerebral dynamo behind all the stories and tiring of having to answer readers' queries of "Where's Sherlock?", hires an unemployed, alcoholic charmer of a ladies' man to pose as The Great Detective. It is John H. Watson, the "Crime Doctor", who provides all the logic and Holmes who, amidst acclaim, hands over the criminal to Scotland Yard. Well, Dr. Watson, played by Kingsley, has finally tired of having to spoon feed clues to the detective and kicks his more famous co-lodger out of Baker Street. Unfortunately, the British Government has need of the celebrated detective's "skills" to recover the set of five pound plates stolen from the Royal Mint and apprehend the criminal before

the Empire is flooded with counterfeit money. Watson is forced to drag Holmes from the bar of the Criterion and the game is once more afoot. The idea of the crime perpetrated in "Without A Clue" is strikingly like the Rathbone-Bruce "Dressed to Kill" sans music boxes and the plot does moves in slow spurts, but it does have its interesting moments. Anyone expecting that Caine, a workhorse of the screen for the past three decades, could convincingly pull off a believable interpretation of the detective is in for a rude surprise; Caine's Sherlock reminds one of Alfie as he somehow carries himself before his worshipful English public in a half serious manner. His defense against being discovered is to fire staccato orders to Watson ("Watson, make a note of that!") in a tone to make the strongest constable tremble. Ben Kingsley gives Watson a more credible character; it might be interesting to see him take on the Doctor's role in a more serious role. Overall, what the plot lacks in twists, turns and sparks, it more than makes up for in comedy. Of course, all the stock characters are included; a grimy, ragged Wiggins, the long suffering Mrs. Hudson, who in this case is not so long suffering and helps to toss Holmes out on his ear, a dapper and sinister Professor Moriarty and the inevitable Inspector Lestrade. The Inspector provides a good deal of comic relief as he tags along behind Holmes, working away to catch the criminal, yet always peeking over the detective's shoulder when he discovers a "clue". All in all, if you're in the mood for two hours of good Sherlockian adventure with a healthy dose of comedy tossed in and a good movie to take your children to see to get them interested in the Canon, then "Without A Clue" is the movie to

see. If you hanker after a movie full of mystery, atmosphere and adventure the likes of "Hound", then stay home and turn on your VCR.

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Here is a short, simple progressive numerical quiz to test you Canonical lore. A prize will be awarded to the first person to answer properly and contact The Litmus Paper at 8015D Holland Court, Arvada, Colorado 80005, or (303) 425-6175:

1. Start with the total number of steps from the ground floor to the sitting room at 221B;
2. Add the total number of Students, Gables and Garridebs;
3. Multiply by the number of equine entries in the Wessex Cup;
4. Multiply by the number of Helen Stoner's sisters;
5. Divide by the number of Indians included in the pact of "The Sign of Four";
6. Add "East by \_\_ and by \_\_".

The answer will be published in the next issue of The Litmus Paper.