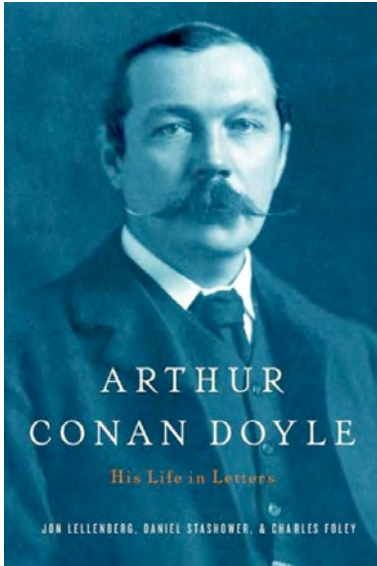


The inner life of the creator of Sherlock Holmes –

Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters

EDITED BY JON LELLENBERG, DANIEL STASHOWER & CHARLES FOLEY

Forthcoming November 1 from Penguin Press



Unseen for six decades, Arthur Conan Doyle’s family correspondence emerges at last, forming a fresh and remarkably candid portrait of the creator of Sherlock Holmes. The great majority of the more than 600 letters in this book were written to his high-spirited mother, perhaps the strongest influence in his life, between 1867, when he left for boarding school, and 1920, when she died. They are wonderful letters—full of charm and humor, with a pervading sense of optimism even when things looked blackest. Conan Doyle had a poverty-stricken upbringing, and then a long struggle getting a medical practice going after starting out on his own at twenty-three. He had an equally hard time getting started as a writer, lamenting after one rejection slip after another, that “literature is a hard oyster to open.” And later, after marrying, he had to fight to save his wife’s life from tuberculosis, at the same time as his secret ten-year romance with the beautiful young woman who eventually became his second wife.

But despite hardship and tragedy, Arthur Conan Doyle’s life was one grand adventure after another—from his six months aboard an Arctic whaling ship as a youth, through his triumphant tour of America, war in Egypt and South Africa, campaigns for social reform and unsuccessful fights to win a seat in Parliament, attempts to warn Britain about the coming war with Germany, struggles with censors in World War I, to his final crusade as a spokesman for Spiritualism. His letters touch on everything in his eventful life, including again and again his love-hate relationship with his most famous character, Sherlock Holmes.

For the first time, in this profusely illustrated book, the reader can peer directly into the mind of the man who created Sherlock Holmes, and did so much more besides.

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BBC’s Book of the Week, Sept. 24-28.

Five 15-minute readings from the book, detailing Arthur Conan Doyle’s years as a struggling young author, may be heard via the Internet starting September 24th. See www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/arts/book_week.shtml for details.

“These extraordinarily vivid letters are so marvelous in scope and so masterfully annotated that they make *A Life in Letters* not only an instant classic of biography, but the most important book recently—and likely ever—published about the man who was so much more than ‘simply’ the creator of Sherlock Holmes.”

— Caleb Carr, author of *The Alienist* and *The Italian Secretary*

“I would walk a mile in tight boots to read his letters to the milkman.”—Stephen Fry

TWO LETTERS FROM THE BOOK

June 1882, Southsea, Portsmouth:

You’ll think me very undutiful, not to say rude, in not answering your kind letter sooner. I take up my pen (which is a shocking bad one, and seems to be growing a beard) to let you know all about our establishment. I first as you know went to Plymouth where Budd and I did not pull together very well. I then went prospecting to Tavistock in Devon but could not see anything to suit. I then set sail to Portsmouth, a town where I knew nobody, and nobody knew me (which was a point in my favour). I took the most central house I could find, determined to make a spoon or spoil a horn, and got three pounds worth of furniture for the Consulting Room, a bed, a tin of corned beef and two enormous brass plates with my name on it. I then sat on the bed and ate the corned beef for six days at the end of which a vaccination turned up. I had to pay 2/6 for the vaccine in London, and could only screw 1/6 out of the woman, so that I came to the conclusion that if I got many more patients I would have to sell the furniture. The same day I got another, and yesterday I got two more, so my name is evidently getting known and I feel hopeful about the future. I write away for the papers in the intervals of brushing floors, blacking boots and the rest of my labours – occasionally glaring out through the Venetian blinds to see if anyone is reading the plate. We are going to have stirring times down here – from ‘my house’ I can hear the cheering of the men in the transports as they steam out of the harbour for the East.

Ever your affectionate fraction,
Arthur

Excuse this letter being so selfish. I know nobody and have nothing to talk about but myself.

November 1891, South Norwood, London:

I have done five of the Sherlock Holmes stories of the new series. They are 1. The Blue Carbuncle 2. The Speckled Band 3. The Noble Bachelor 4. The Engineer’s Thumb 5. The Beryl Coronet. I think they are up to the standard of the first series, & the twelve ought to make a rather good book of the sort. I think of slaying Holmes in the sixth & winding him up for good & all. He takes my mind from better things.

I shall send you cuttings about the White Company when I have accumulated enough of them. So far I have only a few, Scotsman, Telegraph, Daily Graphic, Saturday Review & Observer. They are none of them hostile & yet I am disappointed. They treat it too much as a mere book of adventure – as if it were an ordinary boys book – whereas I have striven to draw the exact types of character of the folk then living & have spent much work and pains over it, which seems so far to be quite unappreciated by the critics. They do not realise how conscientious my work has been. Says the Saturday Reviewer “Fancy a carriage in the neighbourhood of Southampton in the year 1367. I wonder what Monsieur Jousserand would say to this!” As it happens the carriage was extracted from Jousserand’s book on medieval England, where a very elaborate description & picture of it is given. I wrote courteously to the Reviewer and told him so. But that is very typical & somewhat irritating.

THE EDITORS: Jon Lellenberg has authored or edited over a dozen books about Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes, including *The Quest for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, and is the Conan Doyle Estate’s U.S. representative. Daniel Stashower is the author of *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle*, and more recently *The Beautiful Cigar Girl: Mary Rogers, Edgar Allan Poe, and the Invention of Murder*. Charles Foley is Conan Doyle’s great-nephew, and executor of the Conan Doyle Estate.