

More Snippets from Fr Tierney's Log of Ideas

SHERLOCK HOLMES: role of Dr Watson

From "The Creeping Mail" in *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 1927.

The relations between us in those latter days were peculiar. He was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them. As an institution I was like the violin, the shag tobacco, the old black pipe, the index books, and others perhaps less excusable [probably the cocaine injections]. When it was a case of active work and a comrade was needed upon whose nerve he could place some reliance, my role was obvious. **But apart from this I had uses.** I was a whetstone for his mind. I stimulated him. He liked to think aloud in my presence. His remarks could hardly be said to be made to me - many of them would have been as appropriately addressed to his bedstead - but none the less, having formed the habit, it had become in some way helpful that I should register and interject. If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance.

Further along in the same story is a hint of Psalm 16[15]: "I think, Watson, that our *lot* for the next few days might lie in less *pleasant places*."

Again, in "The Story of the Dancing Men" in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, the last and most sinister coded message reads, "Elsie, prepare to meet thy God", which is an adaptation of Amos 4:12, "Israel, prepare to meet thy God."

COMMANDED OR RECOMMENDED

PRECEPTS OF OUR LORD and some of His parables are binding on everyone:

- "Go and do likewise," Good Samaritan, Luke 10:37.
- "Forgive your brother from your heart," Matthew 18:35; (also 6:14,15).
- "Wash one another's feet," John 13:14.
- "Love one another, as I have loved you," John 13:34.

He also praised certain deeds which do not bind everyone in all situations:

- The Widow's Mite, Mark 12:43,44.
- "Sell all that you have; give to the poor," Luke 18:22.

"WASHING OUR HANDS OF IT"

THERE are only two psalms which refer to washing hands and innocence:

"I wash my hands in innocence, and go about thy altar, O Lord," Psalm 26[25]:6. This used be recited at the ceremonial washing of the priest's hands in the Tridentine Mass. It is distorted in the Grail Psalter of our modern Breviary: "To prove my innocence I wash my hands," and sounds like Pontius Pilate, (see below).

"All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence," Psalm 73[72]:13.

Contrast the words and actions of Pontius Pilate: "When Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves,'" Matthew 27:24

SUNDAY LETTERS

ARE the solemnities in the proper of the saints so spread out through the calendar year that there is an equal probability of them falling on a Friday? i.e. and thus dispensing from abstinence (or some personally imposed personal penance)?

Answer: **Yes**, at least, more or less.

First, find the **Sunday Letter** for the year. In this year 2006, the Sunday letter happens to be A. In other years, it will be b, c, d, e, f, g. (Only the first of the seven letters A-g gets a capital letter.) In a complete Church calendar, each date of the 365 days in a year is marked with one of these letters. Thus they repeat every seven days. Every Sunday in 2006 will be A, hence every Friday will be f. (In a leap year, from 29th February, move the Sunday letter back one letter.)

The following is a tabulation of solemnities:

| Letter | Calendar Date | Solemnity |
|--------|-------------------------|--|
| A | 1st January | Mother of God |
| b | 25th December | Christmas |
| c | 15th August | Assumption |
| d | 1st November | AU Saints |
| e | 29th June | St Peter & St Paul |
| f | 17th March 8th December | St Patrick (Australia, Ireland) Immaculate Conception |
| g | 25th March 24th June | Annunciation Birth of St John Baptist |

This table shows two days in 2006 with the letter f, namely St Patrick and the Immaculate Conception. Hence in 2006, these will be two solemnities falling on a Friday and these will not be days of abstinence (or penance). In most years there will only be one.

The **Golden Number** is used in an algorithm for calculating the date of Easter. Golden Numbers depend on there being (nearly exactly) 235 lunar months every 19 years. Take the Year of Our Lord, add 1, divide by 19, and the remainder is the Golden Number. For 2006, it is 12. Ask me how to combine the year, Golden Number & Sunday Letter to calculate Easter.

EATS, SHOOTS AND LEAVES

Eats, Shoots and Leaves has 209 pp by Lynne Truss from Profile Books, 2003. This humorous book on punctuation should prove really helpful for teaching, with its rules listed neatly, and all its examples of good and bad usage. It is refreshingly sensible in approving quite a wide range of usages. I was pleased to find that my own practice passes muster.

It is modern, and deals with the consequences of punctuation for computers, emails and mobile phone text messages, "for better or for worse". Here and there it is regrettably too "modern" and does not refrain from a certain coarseness of reference and expression.

The most important sentence in the book is on p. 202: **"Proper punctuation is both the sign and cause of clear thinking."** The same could be said for grammar and spelling.

This author's more recent book on modern manners has modern crudities, and I recommend against it.