

SCOTLAND YARD'S FORMER CHIEF STRIPS ROMANTIC VENEER FROM CHARACTER OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Sir Basil Thomson Calls Fiction's Famous Sleuth "Queer" and Thinks the Scientific Dr. Watson Far Superior in Solving Perplexing Crime Mysteries

AFTER all, perhaps Sherlock Holmes isn't the world's greatest detective. Sir Basil Thomson, former head of the British Secret Service and of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, London, doesn't think he is.

And Sir Basil has enough authority to make his opinion important. Sir Basil likes Sherlock, no doubt about that—but he can't place too much confidence in his power.

Nor does he believe that the Sherlock Holmes type of detective is general; nor likely to hold a job on a detective squad in a modern city.

This is harsh news for most of us, who like our detectives sleek and lean in mind and body; who marvel at their uncanny penetration; who are inspired by their skill, which approaches a kind of black magic.

We like to see our detectives slink about with the nervous, pouncing movements of a cat; we like them to examine dust with a magnifying glass and immediately pronounce a conclusion as deft and compact as a cake of ice; we like them to be mysterious, fitting silent-like shadows, changing their impenetrable disguises quickly and often as a woman changes her moods; we like them, of course, to be a little morbid—sullen—sinister.

But that's all sped now—at the portent of the quiet words of a most able man.

Sir Basil said the other day: "No—if I had to choose a man for a baffling case on my hands, I'd choose Dr. Watson in preference to Sherlock Holmes."

What kind of heresy is this? one immediately asks. And Sir Basil said it very quietly, as if he himself didn't realize what a shocking thing it was to say.

"You know," he said with a smile, "Sherlock Holmes would want to arrest the Archbishop of Canterbury. Dr. Watson, now, would make something of him, because, after all, the Archbishop is just another one of us decent stupid English."

"Nose" for Criminals Is Prime Requisite

This was rich in intimation. And when such cryptical statements are made, one is likely to misinterpret them. Yet one would suppose from his amusing indirection that Sir Basil's chief objection to Sherlock is his irresponsibility—he is erratic and a shade too "queer."

"You wait," resumed Sir Basil, "until an ex-detective writes a detective story. Then compare your detectives. Sherlock had no organization. He relied too much on his individual wits. He took drugs."

Sir Basil waved an expressive hand, to gather in all the meaning that might be in his phrase: "he took drugs."

"There are three things that make a good detective. In the first place, there is hard work; then organization, and finally luck. And if there is more than a proper amount of luck, then you have these rare and very spectacular solutions."

"Of course, one needs an ordinary amount of intelligence—perhaps just a little more than an ordinary amount."

He mused for a space, and then continued: "But even that isn't enough. There's something else. The only word I know for it is a French one—flair. A detective ought to have flair."

Now "flair" is generally understood to mean "knack." But it also more practically means "scent"—if the dictionary speaks sooth. The second meaning would suggest its significance. Where a reporter must

have a "nose for news" the detective must have a "nose for criminals."

"I can tell you what I mean by flair, with a specific case. There was an investigator on the famous Wimbledon murder not so long ago. He was intelligent, hard working, he gathered his data industriously and well. But his facts led him to the wrong person, though they were eloquent enough in proclaiming the right one."

Sir Basil is living temporarily in New York. He arrived on this side of the sea last month to begin a three months' lecture tour.

He is a stockily built man of sixty-one years, though he doesn't appear to be that old. He is vigorous and strong. His hair is iron gray and his eyes are black. His eyes, of a dark, indeterminate color, burn out with a glint of black fire.

Scarcely enough his face is, but the thin lines about his mouth and eyes indicate his nobility. One is conscious of his pleasant smile when one doesn't normally see it.

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dom and deal with the Bolsheviks." So simply and modestly expressed, all this might not seem much. As a matter of fact, Sir Basil has probably been one of the most important forces in England since 1912.

He found out that the Colonial Office in England wanted some one to go to the Fiji Islands. And he became private secretary to Sir John Thurston, Governor of the British colony of Fiji. He also was made a native commissioner there.

Some time later I went for six months with Sir William McGregor on a tour of exploration into New Guinea," he said. "We had brisk scraps with the natives, lots of excitement, and I took the fever. I had to go home then."

When Sir John Thurston, however, found it necessary to visit the native Kingdom of Tonga and to expel from that country the white premier, a Methodist minister, who transformed the place into a seething hotbed of trouble by his intolerance, he took Basil Thomson with him.

At the age of twenty-seven, consequently, the young man found himself Prime Minister of Tonga.

I gave the natives there a pencil code and got them out of their difficulties," he said.

About that time he was asked to act as member of the present King of Siam, who was to be educated in England.

I was to bring him up as a member of my family, and I did until he was ready to be placed in the British Army. But I established then, I had married and I couldn't very well go to Aldershot. So I went into prison service instead.

First he was deputy governor of the prison at Dartmoor. Then a mutiny occurred at Dartmoor Prison, and Sir Basil was called to suppress it. He re-

turned to his old profession of a writer and dealt with the Bolsheviks.

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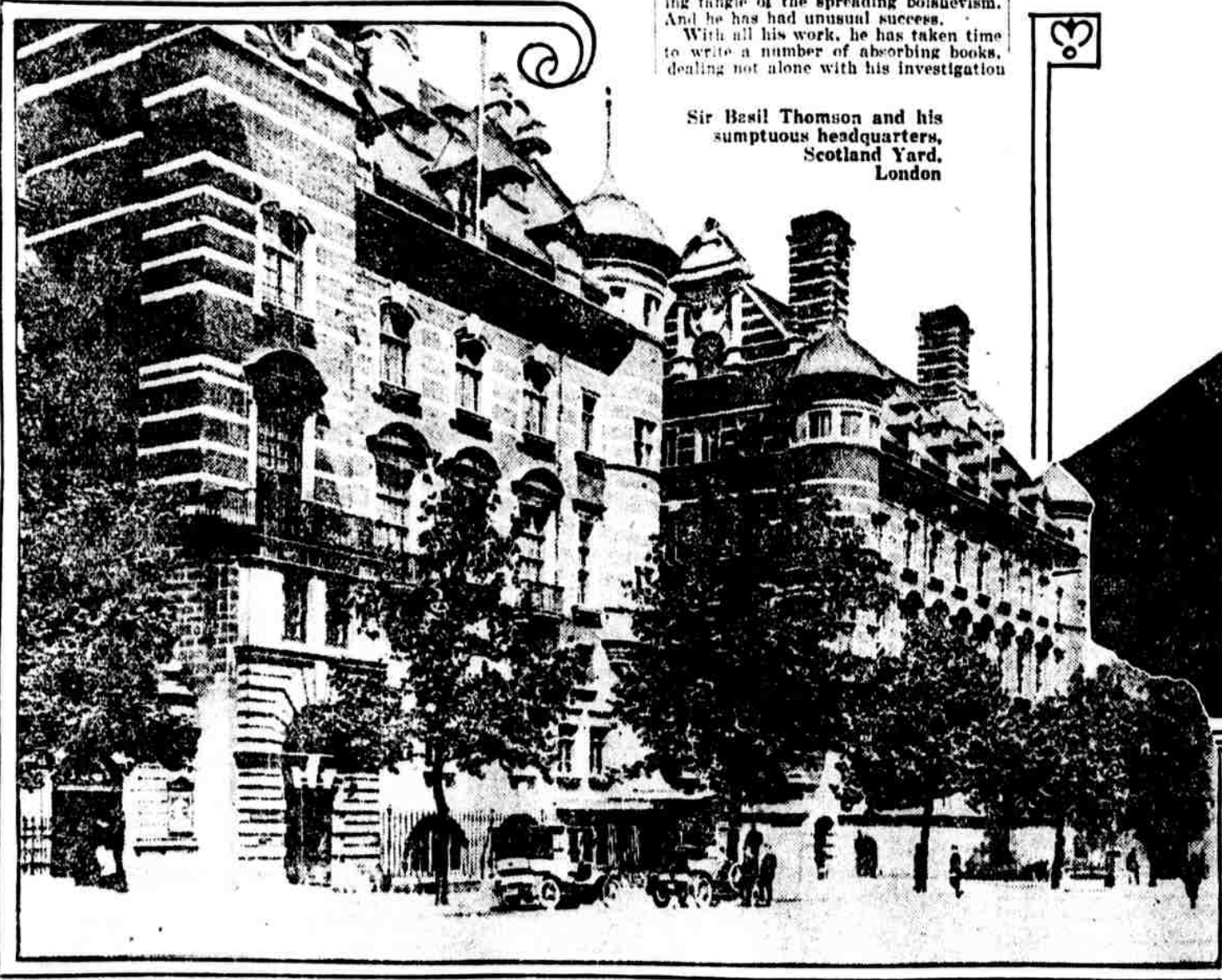
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Sir Basil Thomson and his sumptuous headquarters, Scotland Yard, London



Sir Basil in earnest conversation with Police Commissioner Enright at New York police headquarters during the visit of the eminent British criminologist. What they are discussing doubtless would make interesting reading for the public, but 'twas not divulged

Criminologist Says Intelligence and "Flair" Are Necessary in Tracking Crooks

PERSONAL EQUATION IS FACTOR

Rendered German Spy System Impotent in War; Science His Stock-in-Trade

It is interesting that, although one caught the most striking emphasis in what Sir Basil was saying, he sat as quietly as if he were smoking an after-dinner cigar and had only commented quietly over his paper on an unimportant item of news. His voice kept low and even level, but his emphasis was unequivocal.

Thinks "Third Degree" May Pervert Justice

The question of the third-degree was touched upon, the third-degree whose effect on its victim is much like that of the cruel implements of the medieval torture chamber.

"No, I can't altogether approve of this method of getting at the truth," he said. "We are not permitted to use the third degree in England, you know. I believe that justice may very easily be perverted in that way."

Sir Basil has a hearty commendation for American police. An allusion was made to the impression many Americans have that their "coppers" are rather heavy and dull, and given to not even an active kind of stupidity.

"I think," he said, "that the American police are under-estimated. You see, there are really not enough of them. For instance, New York, I would say, has about 7,000,000 inhabitants, and New York has 11,000 police. London has about the same number of inhabitants and London has 10,000 policemen."

"Besides, in New York about two-thirds of the police are used for traffic. We use comparatively few policemen in London for traffic."

"You see what handicaps the New York police labor under. In this country traffic regulation looms as a very large problem. And I suppose it is largely because of the difference in temperament."

"In London all the traffic is not reduced to a small area, as it is in this country. Our drivers know that if Piccadilly is likely to be blocked there are three or four other ways to get by it. Here the tendency would be to about through Piccadilly anyhow."

"You have more automobile accidents here than we have in England. Perhaps that is one of the idiosyncrasies of your people. If an English driver sees that the street is blocked ahead, he will stop about a hundred yards away from the block. The American driver will carry on till he's right up to it." He paused and smiled.

"I must admit they do it amazingly well; but it is very dangerous."



Young members of the London metropolitan police arriving in mufti for duty at the Royal Gunpowder Factory at Waltham Cross