

Better Holmes and Watson

The Granada Series Reviewed

THE CROOKED MAN
Adaptation: Alfred Shaughnessy
Direction: Alan Grint

"You know, mild adultery has always been commonplace among officers and their wives serving in hot climates," remarks Dr. John H. Watson, late of the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers, to a friend, as they delve into the likely murder of Colonel James Barclay, very late of the Royal Munsters, by his devoted wife, Nancy.

"Thank you, Watson, for educating me in military morality," sniffs a bemused Sherlock Holmes.

It's a whimsical exchange, and one entirely absent from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Crooked Man", published in the 1892 collection *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. Nor does Holmes, on the printed page, require much educating in matters, moral or otherwise, of a military nature. Most of the story is told by the Great Detective himself when he turns up one evening on Watson's doorstep, long after Mrs. Watson has retired for the night. Granada's TV version dispenses, as always, with Watson's wife and her expository baggage. Here, though, writer Alfred Shaughnessy makes another significant change in the adventure: he involves Watson in the investigation (via the good doctor's military background) from the very beginning. Indeed, it's Watson who

brings Holmes into the case through his request for the Master Sleuth's aid. (Another interesting scripting choice on Shaughnessy's part is his identification of the episode's regiment as the Royal Munsters, the name used in American editions of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. British editions have Holmes solve a case concerning the Royal Malloys).

THE CROOKED MAN takes place in the martial setting of Aldershot, with flashbacks to the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857. This tale of betrayal has more than a slight hint of Rudyard Kipling to it, and the strong element of romance plays well against the cool logic of Holmes. As noted, Granada's Holmes "has no interest in military matters"—is indeed rather snobbish about them—which serves to further alienate him from his current surroundings.

Jeremy Brett and David Burke are in top form as Holmes and Watson, their disparate attitudes toward soldiering making for a little friction in the early moments of the episode. Norman Jones is touching in the title role, and Fiona Shaw (who stole what little was worth stealing in 1991's *THREE MEN AND A LITTLE LADY*) makes a strong impression as a friend of Nancy Barclay. As the Colonel and his wife, Denys Hawthorne and Lisa Daniely add a finely-etched portrait to the Holmesian gallery



Jeremy Brett

of dysfunctional marriages. James Wilby, who went on to star in the Merchant Ivory film of E.M. Forster's *MAURICE* (1987), and later played loving son to Diana Rigg's Mama-from-Hell on last year's *MYSTERY!* presentation of the ironically named *MOTHER LOVE*, appears briefly and wordlessly as the young James Barclay.

In 1944 "The Crooked Man" was voted one of the less-successful Conan Doyle stories by the Baker Street Irregulars, but it's among the best episodes of the filmed series. (Oddly, "The Speckled Band", voted the most successful, is not completely at home on film.) Look for the chilling scene when Jones, lit by lightning, appears at the French windows and the camera cuts ever closer to his tortured face. Hitchcock couldn't have done it better.

—Richard Valley

LEFT: The world's greatest detective (Jeremy Brett) and the physician least interested in the practice of medicine (David Burke) solve the decades-old mystery of *THE CROOKED MAN* (Norman Jones). **RIGHT:** Norman Jones as Corporal Henry Wood of the Royal Munsters.



