

## THE THIRD MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN LONDON

by Rick Lai

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In the aftermath of the trial of the Moriarty gang in 1891, two of the most dangerous members remained at liberty. One was Colonel Sebastian Moran, the second most dangerous man in London after Professor Moriarty. The name of the other remains unknown. Perhaps he was the third most dangerous man in London. Because of these associates of the late Professor, Holmes absented himself from London for three years. When Holmes returned to London in April 1894, Moran was still present, but his compatriot was conspicuously absent. Who was this member of the Moriarty gang? A clue to his identity lies in a series of stories by a contemporary of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Arthur Morrison recorded the exploits of a detective named Horace Dorrington. While his abilities as a criminal investigator ranked below those of Holmes, his talents as a criminal rivaled those of Moriarty and Moran. Morrison's *The Dorrington Deed-Box* (1897) contains six tales of the corrupt detective: "The Narrative of Mr. James Rigby," "The Case of Janissary," "The Case of the 'Mirror of Portugal,'" "The Affair of the 'Avalanche and Bicycle and Tire Co, Limited,'" "The Case of Mr. Loftus Deacon" and "Old Cater's Money." *The Dorrington Deed-Box* has been reprinted as part of *Arthur Morrison: Complete Fiction Volume I: Martin Hewitt and other Detective Stories* (Battered Silicon Dispatch Box, 2003). As with the Holmes stories, these tales were not presented in chronological order. Some reconstruction of Dorrington's probable career is necessary before his relationship to Holmes can be construed.

Born in 1856, Horace Dorrington was a tall muscular man with a dark military mustache and deep penetrating eyes. Except for a round and full face, he was rather handsome. For a brutally ruthless man, he could be deceptively charming. He possessed a fondness for cigars and a passion for grouse-shooting.

In 1885, Dorrington was working for meager wages in Deptford ("Old Cater's Money"). His employer was Flint, an unscrupulous ship-stores dealer. Upon the death of Flint's uncle, Jerry Cater, his will left a considerable fortune to his other nephew, Paul Cater. Learning that a missing codicil existed which made him heir to his uncle's wealth, Flint dispatched Dorrington to find the document. Unearthing the codicil, Dorrington treacherously sold it for a thousand pounds to Paul Cater. Dorrington secretly had a copy of the codicil that he intended to sell for the same price to Flint. His plan never reached fruition due the discovery of a later codicil that disinherited both nephews.

The tidy profit of one thousand pounds enabled Dorrington to establish himself as a private inquiry agent in London. With a partner named Hicks, he took offices in Bedford Street, Covent Garden. While Dorrington conducted the firm's investigations, Hicks did most of the office work. Little is known about Hicks except that he was a small wrinkled man about fifteen to twenty years older than Dorrington.

Dorrington achieved considerable fame in 1890 by solving the murder of a wealthy collector of Oriental curios ("The Case of Mr. Loftus Deacon"). Hired by the executor of the deceased's will, Dorrington behaved in an exemplary way throughout the investigation. It suited Dorrington to act honestly in order to gain the reputation that would lure trusting clients to his doorstep.

During 1891, Dorrington was hired to protect a horse before a big race ("The Case of Janissary"). Dorrington prevented Robert Naylor, a bookmaker, from drugging the horse. Furthermore, Dorrington learned that Naylor had a unique way of circumventing the payment of large winnings to his customers. With his wife acting as an accomplice, Naylor murdered any exorbitantly successful gambler. After drugging their victim, the Naylor's drowned him in the cistern of their house. Dumping the bodies into the Thames misled the authorities into believing that the drowning occurred elsewhere. Rather than expose the Naylor's to the police, Dorrington blackmailed them into his service. Changing their name to Crofting, the Naylor's and their cistern moved to another part of London where they served as Dorrington's executioners.

Very little is told of Dorrington's activities over the next two years. The year 1892 found him involved in a case concerning a secret society in Soho. When this unrecorded exploit made him a feared figure in the foreign colony of Soho, Dorrington was drawn into an unsuccessful search for a diamond that had been missing since the French Revolution ("The Case of the 'Mirror of Portugal'"). In 1893, Dorrington extorted a check for 10,000 pounds from an unethical manager of a bicycle company (The Affair of the 'Avalanche and Bicycle and Tire Co, Limited'). The check was never cashed because subsequent events revealed that the manager had squandered his fortune.

In early 1894, Dorrington visited Italy to retrieve an American millionaire's documents that had been stolen by the Mafia. Upon the successful completion of this assignment, Dorrington did not return to England. He departed for Australia where he spent three months on a matter of unknown nature. In the summer of 1894, he embarked on a voyage back to England. One of his traveling companions was James Rigby, a young wealthy Australian landowner ("The Narrative of Mr. James Rigby").

Twenty-one years earlier, Rigby, then only eight years of age, and his family had been touring Europe. During their stay in Naples, Rigby's father killed an Italian bandit in self-defense. The bandit was a member of the indigenous criminal community, the Camorra. Trailing the Rigby family back to London, the Camorra slew the father.

Aware of this family tragedy, Dorrington launched an elaborate plot to gain possession of Rigby's land holdings. Ingratiating himself to young Rigby, Dorrington utilized his recent experience with the Mafia in order to present himself as an expert on Italian secret societies. Dorrington impressed upon the credulous Rigby that it was common for the Camorra to engage in endless vendettas against the families of its enemies.

When they arrived in England during August, Dorrington's scheme entered a new phase. The Australian was tricked into believing that agents of the Camorra were seeking his life. Of course, he went to the firm of Dorrington and Hicks for protection. Dorrington pretended that he needed to impersonate Rigby in order to lure the Camorra into a trap. After Rigby entrusted all his papers including his land deeds into Dorrington's hands. The young Australian was conveyed supposedly for his own protection to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Crofting (formerly Naylor). After being drugged by Mrs. Crofting, Rigby awoke to find himself inside the deadly cistern. As the cistern filled with water, Rigby pounded on the walls. He was saved from certain death by a plumber who had been working on the cistern of a neighboring house. Taken to the abode of the Croftings' neighbors, Rigby summoned the police. Unfortunately, the Croftings had fled. The noises made by the plumber rescuing Rigby had alerted them to

the peril of arrest. Furthermore, they had warned their employers. The authorities found the offices of Dorrington and Hicks abandoned.

In his haste to elude the law, Dorrington had left virtually all of his private papers in the office. Months afterwards, Rigby wrote of his experience in 1895. From the papers abandoned by Dorrington, Rigby was able to rebuild cases of the sinister sleuth. Most of these documents gave only faint outlines of the cases. Rigby was indebted to nebulous “outside inquiries” for most of his detailed information. Rigby must have given his collected findings to Arthur Morrison for major revision. Two years later, these tales of Dorrington were published.

Horace Dorrington could have been the third most dangerous man in London. News of Dorrington’s behavior in the case of Jerry Cater’s testament would have reached Professor Moriarty in 1885. Recognizing Dorrington as a capable criminal, the Professor offered him employment. With the Professor’s support, Dorrington established himself as a private inquiry agent. Aware that Dorrington had betrayed his previous employer, Moriarty fostered another of his hirelings, Hicks, upon the new recruit as a partner. Hicks’s main role was to guarantee Dorrington’s continued loyalty to the Professor.

Certainly Holmes was aware of Dorrington’s existence by the time of the Loftus Deacon case. Unlike the rest of the British public, Holmes recognized Dorrington as a murderous rogue. Holmes’s disruption of the Moriarty gang in 1891 caused Dorrington to form his own gang by enlisting the Naylor and others as his minions. The Professor’s death in Switzerland prompted Hicks to shift his allegiance to Dorrington, the true brains of their joint enterprise. In the years that followed, Dorrington pursued an independent course from Colonel Moran whose sole income after Moriarty’s death appeared to be derived from cheating at cards.

When Holmes returned to London in April 1894, Dorrington was abroad conducting business in either Italy or Australia. After having disposed of Moran in “The Adventure of the Empty House,” Holmes waited for Dorrington to return for their inevitable confrontation. Being in communication with Hicks by telegraph during his travels, Dorrington must have been aware of Holmes’s presence in London long before his own arrival. The overconfident Dorrington did not feel threatened by Holmes. By 1894, the firm of Dorrington and Hicks was so prestigious that it numbered royalty, both European and Asiatic, among its clients. Dorrington felt that he was a figure above reproach. He wrongly concluded that Holmes could never damage his reputation.

As demonstrated by his guise as Escott in “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton,” it wasn’t difficult for Holmes to impersonate a plumber. Doing odd jobs in the neighborhood, Holmes kept an eye on the Croftings’ residence. Upon seeing Rigby enter the house of death, Holmes saw the opportunity to unmask Dorrington by saving his intended victim.

Just as Holmes desired anonymity in the capture of Colonel Moran, the great detective did not want to be publicly connected to Dorrington’s exposure. Rigby knew of his benefactor’s true identity, but he pretended at Holmes’s insistence that the rescuer was merely a common workman who stumbled upon the scene. Watson’s popular accounts of Holmes had given the public the impression that all private detectives were incorruptible. Holmes felt that the publicity attached to his own career had created a climate of trust that Dorrington had exploited. Therefore, Holmes desired that

Dorrington's nefarious doings be highly publicized in order to put society on guard against such scoundrels in the future. He conducted the "outside inquiries" that gave Rigby the details of Dorrington's earlier activities. The next step was to find the proper Literary Agent for Rigby. Since Conan Doyle was too openly associated with Watson and himself, Holmes opted on Arthur Morrison.

Dorrington most likely fled England in 1894. What happened to Dorrington afterwards? Did he ever return for another battle with Holmes? While the answer can never be found in *The Dorrington Deed-Box*, it may lie in Watson's dispatch-box at Cox and Co.