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**THE OTHER MASTER:
FREDERIC DORR STEELE**

A Commemorative Essay
by

ANDREW MALEC

in conjunction with an exhibit of
original and published illustrations

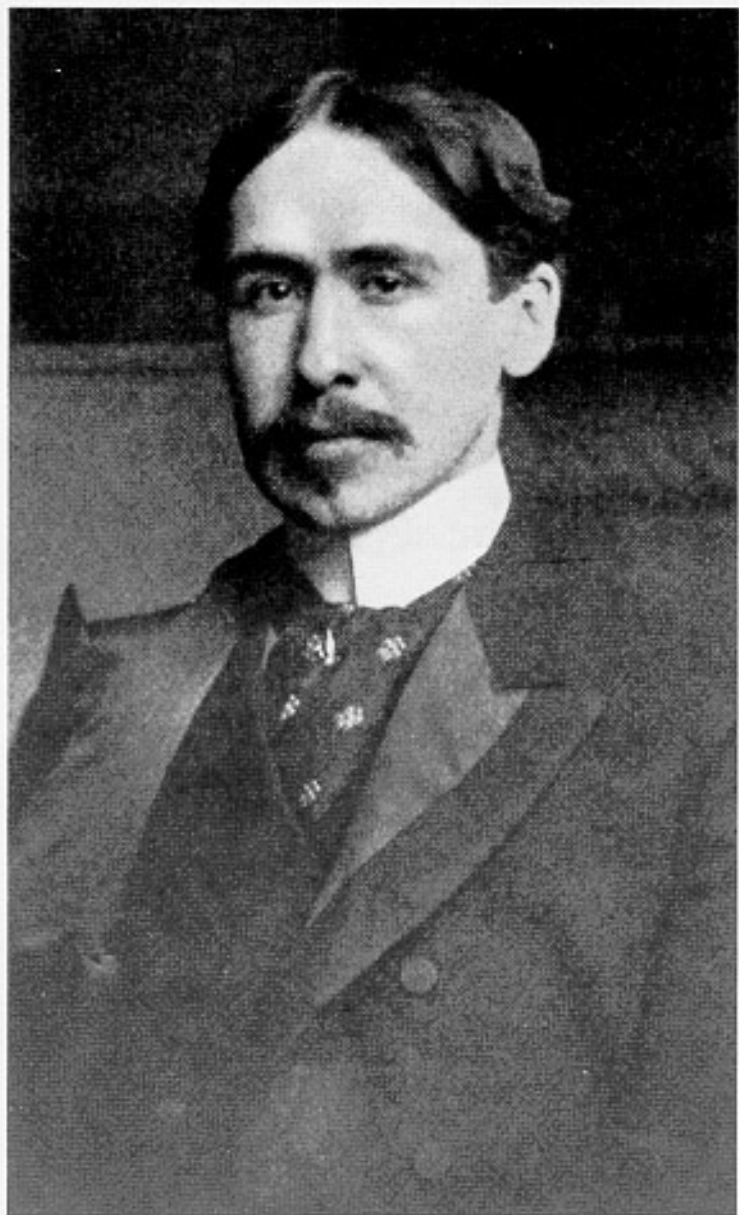
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Frederic Dorr Steele, ca. 1901

It would be too much to suggest that Frederic Dorr Steele was destined to draw pictures for the Sherlock Holmes stories, though like many others who became associated with the Holmes legend he is now chiefly remembered for his contributions to it, resulting in an unfortunate neglect of the rest of his distinguished career. Still, if Steele had done nothing else but illustrate the Holmes tales it would have been enough. It was Steele who confirmed what many Americans had thought all along: that we had a vested interest in Sherlock Holmes.

Steele was particularly well suited to make official the American claim to Holmes because of his own thoroughly American heritage. He was descended on both his father's and mother's side from the Mayflower Pilgrim William Bradford, Governor of Plymouth Colony. The Steele family's American legacy had been started by John Steel (as the name was then spelled), a native of England who sailed for the New World at some date prior to 1630. In 1635 Steel joined the band led by the Puritan leader the Rev. Thomas Hooker as they founded Hartford, Connecticut in order to establish a church free from the restrictions they had encountered elsewhere. Generations hence a descendant of the Rev. Hooker was to give birth to William Gillette, a man who was to figure rather prominently in the life of Frederic Dorr Steele. John Steel's grandson Samuel was to marry a granddaughter of Governor Bradford, thus initiating one half of Frederic Dorr Steele's notable lineage.

Steele's maternal grandmother was born Julia Caroline Ripley, a member of a prominent Vermont family and one of whose ancestors had married another of Governor Bradford's granddaughters. In 1847 she wed Seneca Milo Dorr, a lawyer and the son of a doctor. The couple first settled in Ghent, New York but in 1857 returned to Julia's hometown of Rutland where they built a beautiful house they called "The Maples" near the Otter River. There, with prompting from her husband, Julia Caroline Ripley Dorr began to establish a considerable literary reputation. She wrote several novels, travel books, and other prose works but was chiefly known for her poetry, collected in some ten volumes including the so called *Complete Edition* of 1892 and her *Last Poems* published in 1913, the year of her death. Though many of her poems might be regarded as too sentimental for modern taste she was very highly regarded in her time, counting as personal friends or correspondents such luminaries as Oliver Wendell Holmes and Ralph Waldo Emerson (who included one of her poems in his 1874 anthology, *Parnassus*). Her daughter, Zulma De Lacy Dorr, the mother of Frederic Dorr Steele, was a gifted artist working for the most part in oils and water colors. Though not a professional, she did provide illustrations for some of her mother's poems when they appeared in *Scribner's Magazine*.

Steele's father, William Henry Steele, led an adventurous life before he settled down after marriage. He was prepared to enter Yale in 1863 at the age of sixteen, but had to forgo a university education when poor health induced his doctors to recommend the outdoor life. After several months as a surveyor in Connecticut, Steele took a job with the surveying party of the Marquette and Ontonagon Railroad in the northern peninsula of Michigan. He worked in a variety of capacities for the railroad, often enduring the horrific climate for which the region is famous, but left their service in 1867 after another breakdown of health. Following his recovery Steele established with a partner a sawmill in Eagle Mills, a small hamlet not far from Marquette. The lumber business soon flour-

ished and William Steele brought out to Michigan his bride Zulma, whom he had married in a garden ceremony at The Maples in Vermont.

It was here that Frederic Dorr Steele was born on August 6, 1873, the first of three children. In 1876 the Steele family moved to a house on John Street in Appleton, Wisconsin where Fred was to spend his childhood. His father entered into a number of new business ventures including the Champion Horse Shoe Nail Company which he ran with two partners. Encouraged by his artist mother, Fred began drawing pictures at a very tender age. In his earliest work he showed a penchant for the supernatural, between the ages of three and six preparing pictures later described as including "dreams of the city whose walls were as of jasper, and of a warmly imaginative hell." Before he was seven Fred devoted a summer to the production of an illuminated circus procession which, when unrolled, reached the length of forty-three feet. The summers were often given over to camping, fishing, and swimming as well, with Fred keeping journals of his excursions enhanced by his own illustrations.

Still other boyhood summers Fred spent with his grandmother Julia C. R. Dorr at The Maples in Vermont, to which state his parents subsequently returned. Fred grew very close to her and she further encouraged his artistic inclinations. He would spend hours looking at the illustrated books and magazines of the day, sometimes making attempts to emulate the artists whose work appeared within them. At the age of fifteen Fred was invited to visit the great wood engraver Eldbridge Kingsley at his famous studio on wheels in South Deerfield, Massachusetts. Fred spent two pleasant weeks watching Kingsley practice his art, and South Deerfield became a favorite spot for return visits in the years to come.

By the time he was sixteen Steele had decided to become a professional artist, and he went to New York City in 1889 to get the required training and experience. He first worked three years as an architectural draftsman, acquiring skills which were to serve him well in both his professional and private lives. At the age of eighteen Steele was elected the youngest member of the Kit Kat Klub, where he studied life drawing several nights a week. He took more formal instruction as well, at the Art Students League and in the old National Academy at 23rd Street and 4th Avenue. The fall of 1893 found Steele studying casts in the "antique class" in the cellar of the latter with such soon to be well-known fellow artists as Wallace Morgan and Howard Chandler Christy.

During this period Steele made his first acquaintance with Sherlock Holmes. While visiting the home of his friend Alfred E. Heinrichs in Brooklyn in 1892, Steele was asked if he ever read detective stories. When he said no, Heinrichs read aloud to him three stories from the recently published *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. "This experience," Steele said later, "was enough to attach me to Sherlock and the good Doctor for life."

Shortly after his National Academy days Steele began a two-year apprenticeship in the back room of Harpers' art department on Pearl Street, working under the art editor Edward Penfield at the salary of \$15 a week. When not there he could do what he pleased and like many beginners sold his first drawings to the satirical weekly *Life*. Though Steele's own contributions to the periodical were not substantial, *Life* had provided a start for many other young artists, most notably Charles Dana Gibson. In 1895 Steele illustrated Elizabeth W. Champney's *Paddy O'Leary and His*

Learned Pig: this was probably the first time his work had appeared in a book, and it certainly left him with ample room for advancement.

Steele's early years in New York coincided with the birth of the modern popular-priced periodical, as exemplified by *McClure's Magazine* founded in 1893, and with the introduction of photo-engraving as an inexpensive means for the reproduction of illustrations. The latter development was of more direct importance to Steele, for it meant that anything which could be photographed could now be used to illustrate magazines and books, thereby greatly expanding the number of mediums which could be employed for the purpose. One of the most popular of the photo-engraving processes was the halftone, widely utilized by *The Illustrated American*, the staff of which Steele joined in 1896. Steele described his position on the weekly as that of "boy art editor," and many years later recalled that his "duties were varied: I got to know the engravers, learned a lot, made all kinds of drawings, including anti-Bryan cartoons with a 'Wolf of Socialism' in violent red ink."

Steele's illustrations for the periodical are of particular interest because he almost never did tone work in the years to come. Among them were some striking cover designs depicting such subjects as "New York's Chinatown Celebrating the Visit of Li Hung Chang" and "A Coney Island Tragedy: Burning of the Historic Elephant." Steele's architectural experience came into play when he drew a two-page spread of the Grant Memorial, then about to be dedicated. He also wrote three articles on art for the magazine, disguising his youth under the pseudonym John Flint: "Women of the Great Italian Painters," "Women of the Flemish and Dutch Painters," and "A Typical British Painter" (about Sir John Millais, who had recently died).

When Steele's job on *The Illustrated American* ended in 1897 he became a free-lance artist which, save for an interval during World War I, he was to remain for the rest of his life. Taking a studio in the old Stern Store Building on 22nd Street, he came to know the important art editors, including Jaccaci of *Scribner's*, Chapin of *McClure's*, and Drake of the *Century*, and his work began to appear regularly in all three of their periodicals. Drake gave Steele his first opportunity to illustrate a book by a major author when in 1898 The Century Company brought out a new edition of Frank R. Stockton's novel *The Casting Away of Mrs. Leeks and Mrs. Aleshine* to which he contributed a number of whimsical sketches. Steele supplied some drawings for stories in *Harper's* as well in 1899 and 1900, but thereafter he did not return to the magazine until the 1920s.

With his free-lance career well underway, Steele married Mary Thyng, on November 25, 1898, whom he had met on a visit to Deerfield. Fred and Polly Steele (as she now preferred to call herself) first set up housekeeping in New York City, but soon thereafter moved to a home at 189 Walnut Street in suburban Nutley, New Jersey. The house had a high-ceilinged studio lit by a skylight where Steele could do his work. Their first child, John Frederic, was born in 1899 but was to die at the age of three in a tragic drowning accident. The couple was later consoled by the birth of three more children, Anne Gould, Robert Gilmore (named after a boyhood friend of Fred's in Vermont), and Zulma Ripley. As Steele's career progressed he was able to take in domestic servants and to join the Nutley country club where he was for a time an enthusiastic golfer. The Steeles stayed in Nutley until 1907 and,



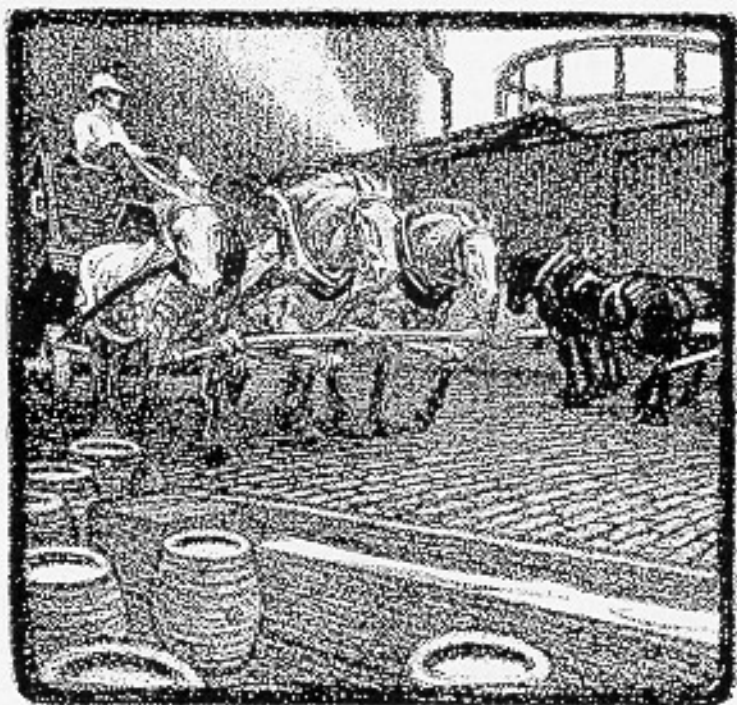
Steele cover design for
The Illustrated American

after a few years back in New York, returned to the same house there until 1912.

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Much of this was still ahead of Steele as the century turned and his career began to flourish. Most of his work at the time appeared in the *Century*, and though a fair portion of it consisted of minor sketches to accompany the humorous pieces printed in the magazine's "In Lighter Vein" column, there were also a number of more substantial contributions. Between 1899-1901 Steele illustrated Seumas MacManus's tales of North Ireland, several of his drawings being evocative depictions of the mists which frequently enshroud the Emerald Isle. In 1901 Steele had his one chance to illustrate a work by Mark Twain when the author's "Two Little Tales" appeared in the *Century* for November. One of the stories concerned a chimney sweep who got the ear of the Emperor, and Steele, concerned that he get the period right, visited a cigar-smoking Twain still in bed at his home on 12th Street. Twain told him "he isn't an ancient Emperor, he isn't a modern Emperor, he's just an Emperor." Steele compromised and made him medieval, later being gratified when Twain sent him a letter thanking him "for that good work." There followed in 1902 stories by Gouverneur Morris and Finley P. Dunne, further extending the list of notable authors whose writings Steele had illustrated. Also in 1902 Steele was elected a member of the Society of Illustrators, just one year after the organization had been formed.

In *Scribner's* Steele made his first attempt at color illustration for Mary Catherine Lee's story "The Wheel of Time" which appeared in the issue for November 1900. He experimented further with the early color processes, which allowed tints to be introduced into his drawings, in 1901 and 1902 when he illustrated two of



Steele illustration for Sewell Ford's story "Skipper" in *Scribner's Magazine*, April 1901

Sewell Ford's horse stories for the periodical, "Skipper (Being the Biography of a Blue-Ribboner)" and "Chieftan: A Story of the Heavy Draught Service."

This work brought Steele to the attention of Arthur Hoeber, who wrote an article about the artist for the April 1901 issue of *The Book Buyer*. The article is worth quoting at some length for the information it provides about Steele's working methods, attitudes towards his profession, and artistic influences. After reviewing Steele's early career Hoeber says:

In *Scribner's Magazine* for November, 1900, appeared some drawings for a story, "The Wheel of Time," reproduced in color by an experimental method of Mr. Steele's devising, by which it was hoped greatly to simplify the process of plate making, separate drawings being made of similar size that the result might be, as nearly as possible, autographic. It is interesting to add that the "Skipper" drawings, in the current *Scribner's*, are done by the same method, with the addition of one color. Though the "Casting Away" drawings and others were done entirely in pen for rapid printing, of the various media, Mr. Steele prefers crayon as for him at least the most immediately expressive.

An interested student always of the European draughtsmen and their methods of reproduction, Mr. Steele is particularly attracted to the work of the Frenchmen, Steinlen, Lepère and Raffaëlli, and, of the younger Germans, Jank and Münzer. He is also cordial in praise of much of our own contemporary work. To quote him, he believes that illustration in its distinctive sense (that is, work done with reproduction as its sole end) is best when kept within its natural limits. Logically, it should be rapidly done, and the most vigorous work is apt to be the swiftest. His own drawings are made rapidly, but as he destroys at least six for each one signed, the output is kept decently within bounds.

While no one may formulate exact rules for the artist, and he must of necessity be the sole judge of the fitness of his own work, it not infrequently happens that there are a spontaneity, freshness and *verve* about the first drawings not so strongly in evidence in pictures that have been gone over many times. It is debatable which is the more important and, as I have said, it is for the artist himself to decide. Mr. Steele claims that while "technique" in an academic sense is unimportant, a personal and direct mode of expression is essential and can only be perfected by the most persistent and serious application, unless one be a natural draughtsman, which he insists he is not, but which all the same I claim he is. While to produce worthy work, most men require an academic training, there are nevertheless some who have this feeling intuitively, irrespective of the schools. I am prepared to admit that they are few and far between, but I maintain they do exist. Mr. Steele is such a one, and a man whose constant companions at home include reproductions of the works of Van Eyck and Memline, and of primitive Italians, who is sensitive to the beauties of Giorgione and Velásquez, who values at once the draughtsmanship of Holbein and of Degas, is not in danger of taking himself too seriously.

In Hoeber's article are referred to a number of attributes which were



Steele illustration for
Richard Harding Davis's
In the Fog

to become Steele trademarks. Throughout his career Steele favored crayon over other mediums for his illustrations, and he seldom strayed from the simpler color processes as employed for his early *Scribner's* productions. Using these Steele became known for his ability to evoke and manipulate mood in his drawings. There is often in his best work a subtle interplay between light and shadow, the intentional introduction of ambiguity making what he does not reveal as important as what is depicted. Alluded to here as well is Steele's perfectionism which not only led to the destruction of many unsatisfactory drawings but also drove him to constantly rework the ones he did preserve, often using patches to cover up the rejected portions with his revisions. Steele's insistence on doing the best he could in his illustrations sometimes worked against his best interests for on occasion he had difficulty meeting deadlines.

Shortly after the Hoeber article was published Steele established a connection with the periodical which was to bring him his greatest fame. His drawings for the Seumas MacManus stories in the *Century* had caught the eye of Richard Harding Davis who suggested that Steele be commissioned to illustrate his new mystery novelette *In the Fog* for *Collier's Weekly*. It appeared there in three installments between November 23–December 7, 1901, and was issued in book form by R. H. Russell the same year along with Steele's illustrations for *Collier's* and some additional drawings by Thomas Mitchell Pierce. The Steele/Davis relationship extended over several years with Steele illustrating some of the author's other works, including his short stories set in South America, "The Spy" and "The Consul," and two of his novels, *Vera*, *the Medium* and *The Scarlet Car*.

When the thirteen stories of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* series began appearing in *Collier's* in 1903, it was only natural that Steele should be chosen to illustrate them: as he had shown with his work for *In the Fog* and other stories, his style was perfectly suited to the task. It was inevitable, too, that Steele should select William Gillette as the inspiration behind his drawings of Holmes. Gillette had scored the greatest triumph of his career when his play *Sherlock Holmes* opened in the United States in 1899 and enjoyed a similar reception when he brought the drama to England two years later. By the time of the *Return* series the Gillette image as Holmes was everywhere, in magazines and newspapers, on souvenir programs and postcards, and even in contemporary reprint editions of the Sherlock Holmes tales which used as plates scenes from the play. To many William Gillette was *the* Sherlock Holmes and Steele was not inclined to disagree with them.

But Steele did not merely reproduce Gillette's features in his illustrations. Through subtleties of expression and posture he captured the Gillette mystique, the air of quiet confidence and insouciance which gave the actor such a strong hold over his audience. Steele, too, presented a very idealized portrait of Sherlock Holmes, one far more handsome than the unattractive figure originally envisioned by Conan Doyle. Still, one was left with the opinion that if Sherlock Holmes did not "really" resemble Steele's illustrations or William Gillette, he should have done so, and it was his loss that he did not. After years of getting Sherlock Holmes from the English secondhand, America had at last made distinguished, permanent contributions to the tradition, Gillette through his play and Steele with his artwork. The latter was to become so influential that Steele frequently found himself correct-

ing the misimpression that his drawings had come first, and that Gillette had based his makeup on them.

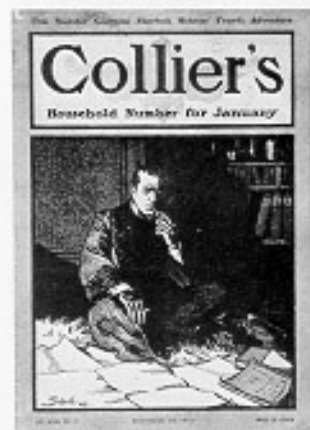
Steele drew ten spectacular color covers and nearly fifty interior illustrations for the *Return* series, in addition to illustrated story headings and decorated initial letters for each of the stories. He did not have a chance to see Gillette face to face until 1905 when the actor invited him for a brief chat in his dressing room during a revival of *Sherlock Holmes* at the Empire Theatre in New York. Steele thus relied on stage photographs of Gillette, but also needed flesh and blood models to pose for his pictures. The first of them was an Englishman named Robert King who stood for all of the *Return* stories. Subsequently Steele used the services of Frank B. Wilson, an Irish actor and former member and stage manager of Sir Henry Irving's company. Wilson had retired from the theater owing to poor health and kept an enormous store of costumes and other properties to help him pursue his new occupation. Wilson was followed by two of his sons and by another model called S. B. Doughty, but when Steele could not get professionals to pose for him he used family, friends, and on at least one occasion himself as seen through a mirror.

Following their run in *Collier's* the thirteen *Return* stories were syndicated to various American newspapers by The McClure Company where they appeared either as special supplements or in the main bodies of the papers. Steele's illustrations were often used in conjunction with those of the newspapers' staff artists; though their work was invariably inferior to his own the process of reproduction the papers were forced to use was so crude that such distinctions hardly mattered. The series was reprinted a number of times in the years to come, thereby exposing Steele's illustrations to many people who may not have seen them in the magazine.

Steele's illustrations for the series were put to still another use in 1904 when P. F. Collier reprinted ten of them in their three-volume *Conan Doyle's Best Books*, a collection of all of the pre-*Return* Sherlock Holmes tales then in the public domain in America, in addition to a number of Doyle's other stories similarly unprotected by international copyright. In several instances the publisher altered the illustrations to make them more suitable for the scenes in the early Holmes tales they were supposed to depict. P. F. Collier kept the edition in print for years and also used some Steele illustrations in their subsequent Doyle reprints, as did another firm, Walter J. Black. Probably as a result of these books and the newspaper reprints Steele's work did not appear in the first American edition of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, published in 1905 by McClure, Phillips & Co. with illustrations by Charles Raymond Macauley.

As Steele's Sherlock Holmes pictures were winning him great public renown he was also gathering more official honors. In 1904 five of his drawings, including his illustration from "The Adventure of the Empty House," showing Holmes just after he had removed his disguise as a book collector to reveal his identity to Watson, were exhibited at the Universal Exposition in St. Louis held to mark the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase. Steele was awarded a bronze medal for this illustration, a distinction of which he was very proud for the rest of his life.

At this time many believed that if Americans were behind their foreign (particularly European) counterparts in many areas of art, we were at least preeminent in the field of magazine illustration.



Stage photograph of Gillette as Sherlock Holmes and Steele's rendition of it for *Collier's*



Title page of catalogue for *Collier's* exhibition at the American Art Galleries (courtesy of the Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

It was in this spirit that *Collier's Weekly* in 1905 assembled an extensive exhibition of the work of nearly seventy distinguished artists then providing illustrations to their periodical, including Frederic Remington, Maxfield Parrish, Charles Dana Gibson, A. B. Frost, and Frederic Dorr Steele. The exhibition began at the American Art Galleries in New York between November 1–November 8, 1905, and over the next fifteen months traveled, in a somewhat modified form, to the Cotocoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Chicago Art Institute, and the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis. Several of Steele's illustrations from the *Return* stories were featured in the show, in addition to a drawing he had done for another story in *Collier's*.

In the catalogue for the New York version of the exhibition Steele was one of only fifteen artists singled out for the inclusion of a special biographical note. Dr. Christian Brinton wrote of him there: "Few of the younger men have attracted wider attention than Mr. Steele. The boldness of his method and the originality of his effects have made him deservedly popular within the scant half dozen years he may be said to have been before the general public."

The show also received considerable attention from the press. Writing in the Chicago-based periodical *Sketch Book* about the appearance of the exhibition in that city J. Nilsen Laurvik said of Steele: "The Work of Frederic Dorr Steele, the famous illustrator of Sherlock Holmes, is full of dramatic power, executed with a simplicity and directness that is as commendable as it is rare. The combination of crayon with pen and ink and wash with pen and ink as employed by him, gives great vitality to a drawing. It is worthy of careful study on the part of every student, not copying (he already has his imitators), in showing how a man may adapt his technique to his needs, as successfully as do Parrish and Leyendecker." Laurvik was rather severe in his remarks about some of Steele's fellow illustrators so this may be taken as high praise indeed. There was little doubt that Frederic Dorr Steele had arrived.

Not that he had any time or inclination to rest on his laurels. In 1905 he drew a number of superb black and white drawings for the serialization of James Barnes's mystery novel *Outside the Law* in *The Metropolitan Magazine*; some of these were reprinted in the book issued by Appleton the next year. In 1908 came two more Sherlock Holmes stories in *Collier's*, "The Singular Experience of Mr. J. Scott Eccles" and "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans." In 1906 *McClure's* gave Steele his first chance at illustrating the work of Rudyard Kipling when they serialized his *Robin Goodfellow: His Friends*. The main illustrations were drawn by André Castaigne but Steele supplied a number of illustrated story headings, decorated initial letters, tailpieces, and other embellishments adding greatly to the effect. Between 1909–1910 he did much the same thing when *The Delineator* ran Kipling's new series of nine Pook's Hill stories. There the primary illustrations were done by Frank Craig and engraved on wood by F. H. Wellington. Steele provided various smaller drawings and ornamentation which he intentionally made to resemble woodcuts so that they might better complement Craig's work.

Steele also began to establish a reputation as an illustrator of children's stories during the first ten years of the century, including the stories of Edwin L. Sabin and Owen Johnson in the *Century*, Myra Kelly and Lucy Pratt in *McClure's*, and George Madden Martin in the *American Magazine*. The Johnson stories were col-

lected as *The Eternal Boy* in 1909 and Martin's tales as *Letitia Nursery Corps, U.S.A.* in 1907, each of the books carrying some of the illustrations Steele had done for the magazine appearances.

Despite his busy schedule Steele occasionally did allow himself some relaxation. Starting in 1904, Fred and Polly Steele (later to be joined by their children) spent their summers on Monhegan Island, a place of great natural beauty ten miles off the coast of Maine. There Steele employed his previous architectural training by designing and building a house along the shore. This was later sold, as the Steeles spent an interval of four summers in Westport, Connecticut around the years of World War I, but they returned to the island in the early 1920s and renovated an old building along the waterfront for a new summer home. The Steeles made many friends on the island, including such fellow artists as Rockwell Kent and George Bellows who also appreciated its attractions. Though during busy periods Fred Steele could only stay there for a few weeks, having to leave his family behind him as he went back to the city, the island became increasingly important to him in the years to come as a place for reflection and relief from the furor of the metropolis.

Another place of escape for Steele was The Players club in New York, of which he became a member in 1905. He found the atmosphere congenial among this happy association of actors, authors, artists, and others in some way interested in the theater, and in later years was himself to become one of the club's most popular members.

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If the first decade of the twentieth century was the one in which Frederic Dorr Steele made his name as an illustrator, the second was a period for consolidation of the position he had attained. In the fall of 1912 the Steeles left their house in Nutley, New Jersey and moved back to New York City for good. They lived in several apartments, but stayed longest in one at 102 West 93rd Street. Steele also always had a studio downtown, the address of this, too, changing from time to time. The family was comfortable if not well off. The Steeles were able to send their children to private schools and employ a live-in maid to help with the cooking and cleaning.

Steele's work appeared only infrequently in *Scribner's* and the *Century* during the decade. Instead, most of his output was divided between *McClure's*, the *Metropolitan Magazine*, the *Woman's Home Companion*, *Collier's*, and *Everybody's Magazine*, with occasional appearances in the *American Magazine*.

In *McClure's*, Steele illustrated Arnold Bennett's story "The Nineteenth Hat" in 1910, and the next year supplied pictures for his play "The Honeymoon." In 1912 and 1913 there were two of Cynthia Stockley's tales of South Africa, which were attracting considerable attention at the time, "The Road to Tuli," and "The Mollmeit." Between 1913-1914 Steele provided some drawings to accompany the photographs in *McClure's* autobiography (ghost-written by Willa Cather) as it was serialized in the periodical. In the *Metropolitan* there were other eminent authors to illustrate, including Kipling again and some South Sea stories by Joseph Conrad. The *Woman's Home Companion* offered writers of a lower calibre, but they did include the popular Myra Kelly whose stories Steele had illustrated previously.

As always there were more Sherlock Holmes stories. In 1911 it



Rockwell Kent with Steele on Monhegan Island in 1905 (courtesy of Zulma Steele Grey)



Steele illustration for Cynthia Stockley's story "The Road to Tuli" in *McClure's Magazine*, April 1912

was "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax" which appeared not in *Collier's* but in the December issue of the *American Magazine*. But the next two Steele illustrated were published in *Collier's*, "The Adventure of the Dying Detective" in 1913 and "His Last Bow: The War Service of Sherlock Holmes" in 1917. The *Collier's* advertising department also reprinted the former as one of four booklets distributed as a 1913 Christmas keepsake, using as a frontispiece a version of Steele's *Collier's* cover for "The Adventure of



Steele's preliminary cover design for *The American Magazine*, December 1911, containing "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax"

the Norwood Builder," with a small portrait of Conan Doyle substituted for the bloody handprint.

Steele did not get a chance to illustrate all of the Holmes stories published during the decade, however. The adventures of "the Red Circle" and "the Devil's Foot" were published in the American edition of the *Strand Magazine* using the English artwork, and *The Valley of Fear* was syndicated to newspapers through the Associated Sunday Magazines in 1914 with Arthur I. Keller's illustrations (which were then used in the book, published the next year). In

part making up for this Steele did illustrate Carolyn Wells's Sherlockian parody, "The Adventure of the Clothes-Line," for the May 1915 issue of the *Century*. It is a slight parody but Steele's portrait of Holmes presiding over Raffles, Father Brown, the Thinking Machine, and the other members of the Society of Infallible Detectives featured in it is memorable.

In late May 1914 Steele at last had an opportunity to meet Arthur Conan Doyle at a luncheon given for the author by Mark Sullivan, then editor of *Collier's*. Steele described the encounter in an article he wrote in 1937:

Here I can tell you what Sir Arthur said to me the one occasion when I met him. . . . I was somewhat palpitant when my turn came to talk with the great man. Would he be kind to me? Would he commend my earnest efforts? I must be self-effacing, I thought; I will ask him about Paget first. "Young man," he began briskly, "do you know who did the best illustrations ever made for me? Cyrus Cuneo!" He began to tell me why; something interrupted; the interview ended. I had not needed to be self-effacing. Sir Arthur effaced me. I can make no explanation of his preference. Mr. Cuneo was notorious for committing the illustrator's deadliest sin, giving the plot away. If he had done the drawings for Watson's tales, I felt sure no cunningly hidden solution, no trick ending was safe.

Steele had had ample opportunity to observe his competitor's work, for Cuneo illustrated a new series of E. W. Hornung's Raffles stories which began appearing in *Collier's* even before *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* had ended its run there; indeed, Steele had done an advertisement for the Raffles series for the magazine. However, Cuneo made drawings for only one Doyle tale, his "How it Happened" in the *Strand Magazine* for September 1913. The Cuneo illustrations would have still been fresh in Doyle's mind, which may explain his apparent high regard for them.

Steele did artwork for a number of other mystery stories during this decade and increasingly came to fear that he was regarded solely as an illustrator of detective fiction, a genre which (save for Doyle) he did not care for. Many of these appeared in *Collier's*, including the Lanagan series by Edward H. Hurlbut, several of Charles W. Camp's stories concerning the police detective Garth, and Geraldine Bonner's novel *The Black Eagle Mystery*. Others were published in *Everybody's Magazine*, such as E. W. Hornung's Crime Doctor tales, Arthur Somer Roche's novel *The Eyes of the Blind*, and two novelettes by the phenomenally popular Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Case of Jennie Brice* and *Sight Unseen*.

Steele's work for *Everybody's* led to a closer association with the periodical during World War I when he accepted a post as its art editor. An attempt was made to revive the then flagging periodical by securing the services of several other noteworthy illustrators of the day, including Henry Raleigh, George Bellows, Albert Sterner, Henry Reuterdahl, and Charles B. Falls. Steele also continued to make his own contributions during this period, illustrating, in addition to the Roche work already mentioned, Joseph Hergeheimer's new novel *Linda Condon*. Unfortunately, this ambitious effort at resuscitation failed, Steele found himself out of a job, and soon thereafter *Everybody's* dropped illustrations entirely.

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Steele illustration for E. W. Hornung's story "The Life-Preserver," one of the Crime Doctor series

The failure to revive *Everybody's* was symptomatic of a number of changes going on in the magazine publishing world following World War I, which were first to hamper and later all but end Steele's career as an illustrator. The war itself had a profound impact on magazines: there was a shortage of manpower and materials and much space previously devoted to fiction was now turned over to photographic records of the conflict. A number of periodicals, including *Collier's*, suffered postwar labor disputes and underwent changes in ownership and editors, leading to a new way of doing things and the disappearance of old friends. Steele did a fair amount of work for the periodical between 1920-1921 (including the stories of Berthe K. Mellett) but after that his contributions tapered off to virtually nothing.

A number of illustrated magazines became smaller or like *Everybody's* eliminated artwork altogether: this happened to *Harper's Monthly Magazine* when Steele was in the middle of illustrating a new series of G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories for them. The layouts of magazines began to change, sometimes resulting in the splitting of illustrations across two pages (a development Steele loathed) and the running of large parts of the stories back into the advertising section, giving greater readership to the ads but leaving less room for pictures. Gone as well was the era of the great editors and their leisurely correspondences with authors and artists. The great emphasis was now on speed, and there was less tolerance for a perfectionist like Steele who sometimes fudged on his deadlines. Without benefit of a distant perspective, Steele found it difficult not to take some of these things personally.

With a family to support, Steele was at first able to adapt himself, and the 1920s was perhaps the most varied decade of his life. There remained a number of magazines he had not worked for, including the *Red Book* where between 1921-1923 he illustrated stories by Mildred Cram and Beatrice Grimshaw. Not all of the old sources had dried up, and the *Woman's Home Companion* still kept him fairly busy throughout the ten years, particularly with two series of stories about Mexican school children by Elinore Cowan Stone. Steele pursued different avenues as well, starting to contribute illustrations to newspapers for such authors as Louis Tracy whose serial *The House of Peril* ran in *The Boston Post*. Steele taught for a brief period as well, joining the faculty of the Art Students League as an instructor in illustration and composition during the 1921-1922 session. By then he had also started to do portraits in red chalk and charcoal, occasionally on commission and at other times to please himself when nothing else was pressing.

More Sherlock Holmes stories came to him, and at a faster rate than had been the case the previous decade. The first two appeared in *Hearst's International*, "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone" in 1921 and "The Creeping Man" in 1923. Steele did additional work for *Hearst's* during the early 1920s as well, including some illustrations for a story called "Dice, Brassknuckles & Guitar" by a newcomer named F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Later there were six more Holmes tales in *Liberty*, a periodical Steele first became associated with in 1925 when he illustrated Frank L. Packard's serial *Broken Waters* there. The six stories appeared between 1926-1927, making up the last of *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* series: the adventures of "the Blanched Soldier," "the Three Gables," "the Lion's Mane," "the Retired Colourman," "the Veiled Lodger," and "Shoscombe Old Place."

However, four of the Holmes stories published during the

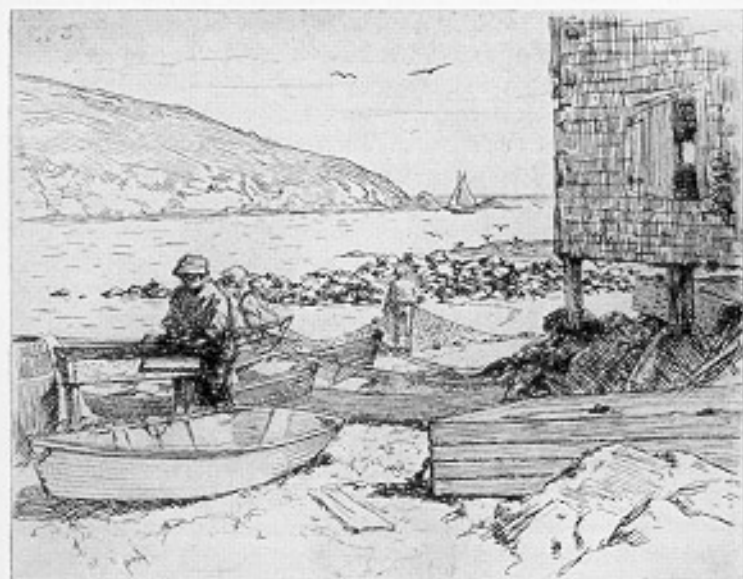


A middle-aged Frederic Dorr Steele, seen in his studio (courtesy of Robert G. Steele)

decade were not sent to Steele but rather were given to G. Patrick Nelson ("The Problem of Thor Bridge") and W. T. Benda ("The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire") in *Hearst's International*, and J. R. Flanagan (the adventures of "the Three Garridebs" and "the Illustrious Client") in *Collier's*. Steele could understand why he was overlooked by *Hearst's* for their two stories for he was then busy for them on other projects, but he was deeply hurt when passed over by the new editors of *Collier's*. Some measure of consolation came in 1925 and 1927 when Steele was commissioned by the North American News Alliance to illustrate three of these stories (all but "Thor Bridge") plus four of those he had previously done for *Hearst's* and *Liberty* ("the Creeping Man," "the Blanched Soldier," "the Three Gables," and "the Lion's Mane") for newspaper syndication. For each Steele prepared an entirely new drawing or adapted one he had done for the magazines.

Despite such activities Steele found himself with a lot of time on his hands as the decade progressed. He spent more time on Monhegan Island, taking up etching there in 1927. In this medium he became quite proficient, often using as the subject of his etchings the beautiful scenery around him, and happily practicing art for its own sake. Cartography was another pursuit, and Steele worked for years revising his etched map of the island. Steele was an accomplished photographer as well, and it was common for residents of Monhegan to see him out on strolls with a camera around his neck. In 1928 he wrote an amusing little Sherlock Holmes parody about this hobby called "The Adventure of the Missing Artist" for Alexander F. Victor, inventor of cameras and projectors for 16 millimeter film. In it Holmes and Watson look into the mysterious disappearance of Frederic Dorr Steele, eventually discovering that the artist had run away to Monhegan to try out one of Victor's latest movie cameras. This parody remained unpublished until 1967 when James Bliss Austin, working from the original illustrated manuscript, issued it as his *A Baker Street Christmas Stocking* for that year.

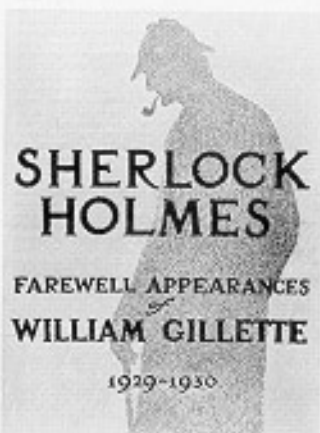
Back in New York Steele emerged as one of the most prominent members of The Players during the 1920s, his prowess at the pool



Steele's etching *Fish Beach*, 1930 (courtesy of Robert G. Steele)



Program for The Players's revival of *Becky Sharp* in 1929 with Steele cover illustration



Souvenir program for the farewell tour of Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes*, with Steele cover illustration

table there earned him the nickname "the Little Giant." He edited their publication *The Players Bulletin* for several years, at the same time making a number of contributions to it himself including another Sherlockian parody, "The Adventure of the Missing Hat-rack," in 1926. The illustrated skit was filled with inside jokes and digs best understood by those fellow members at whom they were amiably directed, but Steele rightly prided himself for capturing the flavor of Conan Doyle's narratives. At the suggestion of a friend Steele sent a copy of it to Doyle, only to receive a perfunctory note signed by Sir Arthur's secretary in return. Steele was put off by this apparent rudeness, but perhaps did not realize that at the time Doyle was so deeply involved in his Spiritualism campaigns that his personal correspondence had reached some hundreds of letters a day. Steele was also active in The Players's annual revivals of classic plays, including *Julius Caesar* in 1927 and *Becky Sharp* in 1929, drawing the cover illustrations and writing historical articles for the programs, and sometimes taking part in the performances themselves.

Other friendships were made through the mails. In 1921 Steele began a correspondence with Dr. Gray Chandler Briggs, a St. Louis physician and Roentgenologist and one of the prototypical Sherlockians. Briggs told the artist of his recent visit to London during which he had followed the clues in Conan Doyle's story "The Adventure of the Empty House," and thereby identified what he believed to be the original of Holmes and Watson's lodgings in Baker Street. Briggs sent along a hand-drawn map and photographs to back up his findings, including one of Camden House, the structure opposite the alleged quarters of the great detective, just as it had been in Doyle's story. But Briggs's chief reason for writing had been his strong admiration for Steele's Sherlock Holmes illustrations, one of which he had seen displayed at the St. Louis exhibition in 1904. Briggs eventually acquired through gift or purchase the originals of some two dozen of these, thus forming the basis of one of the most legendary Sherlock Holmes collections of them all.

As the decade came to a close Steele was again called upon to draw pictures of his most familiar subject, this time to help promote the farewell tour of William Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes* which was eventually to extend between 1929-1932. For the tour Steele helped prepare a four-page advertising leaflet including an order form for tickets, designed a lithographed poster, and put together the elaborate souvenir program issued in connection with the drama. Included among his illustrations for these were reworkings of his *Collier's* cover for "the Norwood Builder" and a portrait of William Gillette drawn (for the first time, for Steele) from life. Steele wrote an article for the souvenir program as well, entitled "Sherlock Holmes: A Little History of the World's Most Famous Fictional Character." In the article Steele traces the early publication history of the Holmes tales, comments on the various artists who had illustrated the stories while reminiscing about his own contributions to the Sherlockian iconography, and discussed such other topics of interest as Dr. Briggs's identification of 221B Baker Street. Doubleday, Doran & Co. subsequently used some of Steele's illustrations and a revised version of his article when they published the first trade edition of *Sherlock Holmes* in 1935. A facsimile of this edition was published by Helan Halbach in 1974.

Earlier there had been another Steele connection with the play, but in another medium. In 1922 a silent-film version of *Sherlock Holmes* was made with John Barrymore in the title role. Steele hap-

pened to see Barrymore just off the train from Hollywood after completing the movie. When Barrymore told Steele of the photo-play Steele remarked that he used to make pictures of Sherlock Holmes and was much pleased when the actor responded: "Why, hell, we had all of your old pictures out on the lot. You're more to blame than Gillette."

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With the coming of the depression Steele's career as a magazine illustrator ground to a virtual halt. Many of the periodicals he had worked for no longer existed or seemed to have forgotten him if they did. Some of his work began to appear in children's periodicals like *The American Girl Magazine* and *The Youth's Companion* and in such obscure places as *The Elks Magazine*. Steele found himself making the rounds of the art editors' offices to ask for work, a humiliating process he soon tired of. His children had now grown and left home, and he and his wife Polly had moved into a smaller apartment downtown. Life became difficult, and Steele was generally unhappy.

Periodical work being denied to him, Steele turned again to the newspapers, in particular the *New York Herald-Tribune* where he first drew pictures for their weekly magazine and then began to contribute to their Sunday theatrical section. Here his longtime membership in *The Players* served him well and his theatrical sketches were regularly featured in the paper until the end of his life. Among the numerous plays represented by Steele's pen during this period were *Tobacco Road*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Town*, *Rain*, *Cabin in the Sky*, *Watch on the Rhine*, *Show Boat*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and *The Skin of Our Teeth*. The actors and actresses Steele depicted in his sketches included such well-known figures as Tallulah Bankhead, Walter Huston, Ethel Waters, Judith Anderson, Katharine Cornell, Helen Hayes, Sidney Lumet, Arlene Francis, and Ray Bolger.

Steele also had to take on a fair amount of hack work during this period, including the occasional courtroom sketch or advertisement. He designed a number of dust jackets for Doubleday's Crime Club as well, particularly for the Reggie Fortune and other books of H. C. Bailey, but felt that the payment he received for these hardly justified the effort involved. Steele was sometimes relieved from these uninspiring chores through the receipt of a commission for a portrait in chalk or charcoal.

The decade had at least started out on a high note when Steele and his wife managed to scrape together enough money to make their one visit to Europe, leaving for a five month tour of England, France, and Italy in the fall of 1931. In London Steele walked along Baker Street checking Dr. Briggs's conclusions, reporting back that things were substantially the same as the physician had described them ten years earlier. As they traveled Steele did a number of sketches, especially in Italy. Some of the slighter of these were reproduced in 1933 in Sydney A. Clark's *Italy on \$50*, one of a series of Clark's books on how to see Europe as inexpensively as possible. Steele sent some of his written impressions of the visit to Franklin P. Adams for his column "The Conning Tower," in which many examples of the artist's poetry and prose appeared over the years.

Between February 4-23, 1935 Steele had a one-man show of his Italian sketches along with other drawings and etchings at the Contemporary Arts Gallery in New York. He was interviewed during the show by the *Herald-Tribune*, and made some candid remarks



Steele's original dust jacket design for H. C. Bailey's *Shadow on the Wall*, published by Doubleday's Crime Club in 1934



Steele on Monhegan Island, 1936 (courtesy of Mrs. Zulma Steele Grey)

about the current status of magazine illustration. Though Steele believed that there were as many talented illustrators around as ever before, he thought that magazine editors, afraid of competition from their rivals, had come to demand such a standardized product that it was difficult to distinguish the work of one artist from that of another. Steele treated the same subject in a more sardonic vein in another Sherlockian parody, "The Adventure of the Murdered Art Editor," which first appeared in Richard Butler Glaenger's anthology of humorous pieces *Spoofs*, published in 1933. This parody bears great similarity to Steele's earlier "The Adventure of the Missing Artist," though in this case Steele has sequestered himself on Monhegan Island where he divides his time between etching and plotting the destruction of magazine art editors.

If the magazine editors were no longer interested in Steele's work, other people were. In 1932 Steele was approached by the Library of Congress to donate some of his drawings to their newly formed Cabinet of American Illustration, designed to preserve the work of the many artists who had been active in the field. The next year Steele gave 145 examples of his work to the Library, consisting of reproductions and drawings in pencil, crayon, and crayon and ink, in addition to five more sheets bearing 30 sketches. Some of these went as far back as 1901 while others had been done as recently as 1932, the whole representing a comprehensive if not complete overview of Steele's career, including some of his Sherlock Holmes work. Steele was the first living illustrator to have his work exhibited from the Cabinet, more than 100 of his drawings first going on display on March 29, 1937, with some of them remaining on view into the summer of 1939 when the Library's subsequent exhibits of Arthur B. Frost and F. Walter Taylor were not large enough to fill all their cases.

Charles Honce used the exhibit as a pretext to write an Associated Press article commemorating the 50th anniversary of the publication of *A Study in Scarlet* in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1887, interviewing Steele for the purpose. For the occasion Steele drew his now famous self-portrait showing himself being viewed through a magnifying glass by Sherlock Holmes. When Honce reprinted his article in his book *A Sherlock Holmes Birthday and Other Bookish Stories Conceived in the Form of News* in 1938 he used the Steele drawing as a frontispiece, and it has since appeared in many other publications.

Steele was sought out by other organizations as well. In 1939 he was asked to speak at the Grolier Club about American illustrators in connection with a retrospective exhibition of their work then being held there. He was persuaded by the editors of *The Colophon*, who had been in attendance, to write up his talk for publication and it appeared in no. 3 of their New Graphic Series for September 1939 under the title "Veteran Artist Goes Reminiscent." In this enchanting and eloquently written essay Steele reflected on his own career and told numerous anecdotes about the other illustrators he had known, presenting in words a memorable portrait of a bygone era. The article was accompanied by a number of Steele's illustrations along with those of other artists, the former group including a tailpiece showing a shabbily dressed Steele, canvas under arm, running away from the watchful eye of a cross-looking Sherlock Holmes.

Also in 1939 Steele became connected with a film which would make another actor famous for playing Sherlock Holmes when Twentieth Century Fox commissioned him to draw several promo-

tional illustrations for their version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, starring Basil Rathbone. Steele prepared several excellent illustrations in crayon for the studio and was disappointed when they ended up using them only in trade journals and not for their regular publicity campaign.



One of Steele's publicity drawings for Twentieth Century Fox's 1939 film, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

The Players became a second home to Steele during the 1930s and he began to use it as the return address for most of his correspondence. The June 1, 1932 issue of *The Players Bulletin* featured another of his illustrated Sherlockian parodies, "The Attempted Murder of Malcolm Duncan," in which Holmes is called in to investigate the attempts of Steele and his partner Rollin Kirby to eliminate their competition in a pool tournament. In 1938 the club issued a volume to mark their 50th anniversary entitled *The Players Book: A Half-Century of Fact, Feeling, Fun and Folklore* in which there appeared a number of Steele contributions, including a reprint of his earlier parody "The Adventure of the Missing Hatrack." The previous year had seen the death of William Gillette, one of the charter members of the organization, and Steele was chosen as the one most appropriate to write the actor's obituary for *The Players Bulletin*. Steele was one of the many artist members of the Dutch Treat Club as well, and supplied a drawing captioned "Sherlock Takes a Chance on a D.T. Lunch" to their *Twenty Fifth Anniversary Year Book* in 1930, to accompany the facsimile reproduction of some notes William Gillette had made for a talk delivered there.

Steele also became closely associated with the early Sherlockians during this period of his life. In 1930 he was first contacted by Vincent Starrett who was then writing his *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, to be eventually dedicated to Steele along with William Gillette and Gray Chandler Briggs. Steele was able to add to Starrett's knowledge of the previous illustrators of the Holmes tales and for a time it seemed that he might contribute a chapter on this topic to the book himself. However, Steele decided to explore the subject in an independent article instead which appeared in the *New Yorker* for May 22, 1937 as "Sherlock Holmes in Pictures," an



Ellery Queen's 1944 anthology *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes* with dust jacket illustration by Steele

account full of both Steele's personal recollections and his frank opinions on the relative merits of other delineators of the great detective.

On December 7, 1934 Steele was present at the first dinner of the Baker Street Irregulars in New York, at which function William Gillette was also a guest. Steele attended many of the Irregulars' subsequent dinners and starting in 1940 his drawings began to appear frequently on their menus and associated memorabilia, a tradition which continues to this day. His prose and pictures were included in some of the Irregulars' early scholarly works and anthologies as well. Edgar Smith's *Baker Street and Beyond: A Sherlockian Gazetteer* (1940) featured a Steele Sherlockian frontispiece drawn expressly for the purpose. Also in 1940 came an anthology edited by Vincent Starrett, *221B: Studies in Sherlock Holmes by Various Hands*, in which was reprinted a slightly revised version of Steele's article "Sherlock Holmes in Pictures"; reproduced in the book as well were a two-minute sketch of Holmes Steele had once done for Starrett and the artist's 1929 portrait of William Gillette. For his frontispiece in Edgar Smith's 1944 anthology *Profile by Gaslight: An Irregular Reader About the Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* Steele prepared a new version of the poster illustration he had drawn for the farewell tour of the Gillette play. But Steele was most widely represented in another 1944 anthology, Ellery Queen's *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Appearing therein was a reprint of his parody "The Adventure of the Murdered Art Editor" headed by a variation of the self-portrait he had drawn for Charles Honce; two of his illustrations for Carolyn Wells's "The Adventure of the Clothes-Line," one used as a frontispiece to the volume and the other to accompany the parody itself; and still another version of Steele's poster design for Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes*. Steele also prepared an excellent illustration for the dust jacket of the Queen anthology.

As pleasant as these diversions may have been for Steele, they brought him very little money (if indeed any), of which he was in increasingly short supply. Things were not going well in his private life either. There had been some trouble in his marriage for a number of years and in 1936 he and his wife separated; though they never divorced, they thenceforth lived apart. Steele moved into his studio, eventually ending up in one at 717 Greenwich Street where he was to stay for the remainder of his days, taking his meals at a restaurant around the corner. He had been carrying around a medicine for a heart condition for some time and now that he was living on his own he began to neglect his diet and health. His income was very small now, and he eked out a bare living through his theatrical drawings in the *Herald-Tribune*.

Amid this melancholy state of affairs came a letter in 1939 from George Macy of the Limited Editions Club holding promise that Steele might be able to realize one of his longtime ambitions: to illustrate all sixty of the Sherlock Holmes stories, including those he had not already done in one place or another. Such a project had been in the wind for several years. In his *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1933) Vincent Starrett had argued the desirability of a definitive edition of the Canon illustrated throughout by Steele, and as early as 1934 the Limited Editions Club was suggested to the artist as a possible publisher for such a venture. Encouraged by such Holmes enthusiasts as Dr. Briggs and Stuart Rand, a Boston lawyer, Steele mapped out a scheme by which he would be able to accomplish the task. Though it would be too large a project starting from

scratch, Steele thought he could lessen the work load by adapting many of his previously published Sherlock Holmes illustrations so that they would be better suited for reproduction in a book. He had already (including his crayon drawings for the film version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) illustrated thirty of the Holmes tales in at least some manner, and further believed that a number of his drawings for them had been of a sufficiently general character that they could be moved from one story to another. Taking this approach Steele thought that he could reduce to a manageable number the total of entirely new illustrations he would have to prepare.

However, in part owing to uncertainties about who had the right to grant permission for reprinting the Sherlock Holmes stories, the project was put in limbo for several years. In the interim Steele was commissioned to illustrate another volume for Macy's Heritage Club, their 1941 edition of W. Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence*, which also included reproductions of the paintings of Paul Gauguin, the artist upon whose life the novel was loosely based. Still, it was the Sherlock Holmes project which most interested Steele and as the years dragged on he became restless at the lack of progress.

The final go ahead did not come from Macy until October 1943, at which time the Club had still not received permission to publish their edition. Steele worked rapidly, almost frantically, keeping at it through Christmas and into the new year. He gathered together as much of his old work as he could lay his hands on (including several of his illustrations for non-Sherlock Holmes stories which he thought would be suitable) in order to revise it for the new purpose. He was the busiest he had been for years, and perhaps the happiest.

But it was too late. The combination of inadequate diet and overwork finally caught up with Steele and in the spring of 1944 he suffered a breakdown in health. He was taken from his studio in a half-delirious state by his daughter, Zulma, and brought to the Mountainside Hospital in Montclair, New Jersey, where he was diagnosed as having pellagra. The Limited Editions Club had to wait until 1950-1952 before they could finally publish their complete Sherlock Holmes in eight volumes, and from the work Steele had managed to finish they were able to use fifty-eight illustrations. This proved to be an inadequate number so they also included in their volumes a representative selection of the work of other illustrators of the Holmes tales. The eight volumes were in turn reprinted as three by the Heritage Club between 1952-1957.

Steele was never to recover. Following his two-month stay in the Mountainside Hospital he spent a similar period in the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York. Later he became a patient in Bellevue Hospital where he died on July 6, 1944, in his seventy-first year. His death was widely noted in the press, and between March 26-April 7, 1945 a Memorial Exhibition of his works was held at the Morton Galleries in New York. Tributes from a number of Steele's friends were printed in the catalogue for the exhibition, of which the one by Rockwell Kent might also be appropriate for this new exhibition mounted some forty years later: "A memorial exhibition of an artist's work is an event of an extraordinary nature: a man whose departure has been mourned returns; and through his work he speaks to us. Incline yourselves toward his work as all who knew Fred Steele inclined their ears to hear the worth-while things he'd say so quietly."



Catalogue for Steele Memorial Exhibition at the Morton Galleries, with the artist's self-portrait on cover

Note on Sources and Acknowledgements

Frederic Dorr Steele's place in the history of Sherlockian illustration has been admirably treated in two works: James Montgomery's *A Study in Pictures* (1954; reprinted, 1984) and Walter Klinefelter's *Sherlock Holmes in Portrait and Profile* (1963; reprinted, 1975). Reference to briefer discussions of Steele can be found in Ronald Butt De Waal's two bibliographies: *The World Bibliography of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* (1974) and *The International Sherlock Holmes* (1980). A number of Steele's illustrations for the Holmes tales are beautifully reproduced (often in color) in Bill Blackbeard's 1981 compilation, *Sherlock Holmes in America*.

Information on Steele's other work is harder to come by, though a number of clues are offered in the artist's own published reminiscences cited in the text. For many additional details I am profoundly indebted to Frederic Dorr Steele's children, Mrs. Anne Steele Marsh, Mrs. Zulma Steele Grey, and Mr. Robert Gilmore Steele. Robert Steele has been particularly helpful and patient with my many letters. As the family historian he has written two books shedding considerable light on the private life and background of Frederic Dorr Steele, *A Yankee Pedigree* (1969) and *With Pen or Sword: Lives and Times of the Remarkable Rutland Ripleys* (1979); he has also shared with me several unpublished recollections of his father. Mrs. Grey lent me, in addition to a number of other useful research materials, files of correspondence relating to Frederic Dorr Steele's involvement with the Limited Editions Club and the Cabinet of American Illustration in The Library of Congress.

Assistance was also rendered to me by institutions and publishers. Mr. Louis A. Rachow, Curator and Librarian of The Walter Hampden-Edwin Booth Theatre Collection and Library, supplied me with invaluable information about the association between Frederic Dorr Steele and The Players. Mr. Bernard F. Reilly (Curator of Popular and Applied Graphic Art) and Mr. Jerry L. Kearns (Head, Reference Section), both of The Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, provided me with background information about the Library's Cabinet of American Illustration and supplied photocopies of the catalogue cards for its Steele holdings containing many valuable citations to his published work. The following individuals have helped me with information about the appearance of the *Collier's* exhibition in their cities or institutions: Mr. William

B. Walker, Chief Librarian of The Thomas J. Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; Ms. Kathryn Vaughn, Reference Librarian of the Art Institute of Chicago; and Ms. Katherine Kovacs, Archivist of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Mr. David M. Glixon and Mr. Sidney Shiff of the Limited Editions Club assisted me in locating details about Steele's work for their edition of the Sherlock Holmes stories and Ms. Heather Pope provided me with a photocopy of their Frederic Dorr Steele file.

I am also indebted to a number of private collectors and friends. Dr. John P. Crotty of St. Louis, who acquired the Gray Chandler Briggs collection including most of the original Steele illustrations, has been unfailingly generous with his time. John Nieminski checked a number of important citations for me and sent me photocopies of the Steele illustrations to which they referred. Other help was provided by: Carl H. Anderson, George Armstrong, James Bliss Austin, Peter E. Blau, J. Randolph Cox, Marvin P. Epstein, Thomas Galbo, Rollin van N. Hadley, Paul D. Herbert, Stan Hill, Mrs. Lucy Keddie, Bruce Kennedy, Walter Klinefelter, Otto Penzler, John Bennett Shaw, and William R. Smith. I am also grateful to the Sherlockian dealers Paulette Greene and Peter L. Stern.

The citations derived from these sources and individuals have been supplemented by my personal searches of the periodicals to which Steele was known to contribute, a process sometimes hampered by the lack of complete runs of the magazines involved. It is hoped that at least the outline of Steele's career has been presented here and that the artist will someday be made the subject of the book length study he so richly deserves.

Most of the materials displayed in this exhibition have been selected from the Mary Kahler and Philip S. Hench Arthur Conan Doyle Collection, donated to the University of Minnesota by Mary Kahler Hench in December, 1978. We are grateful to the Steele family for the loan of a number of other valuable materials. In addition, we would like to thank the following individuals and institutions for their donations or loans to the exhibition: Dr. John P. Crotty, Mr. J. Randolph Cox, Mr. John Bennett Shaw, The Walter Hampden-Edwin Booth Theatre Collection and Library, and The Thomas J. Watson Library of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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