



## Arthur Conan Doyle: Doctor

Letter written at Bush Villa, Southsea on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1887 to *The Evening Mail* (published on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1887).

Sir -

I am aware that Anti-Vaccinationists endeavour to account for the wonderful decrease of smallpox by supposing that there has been some change in the type of the disease. This is pure assumption, and the facts seem to point in the other direction. Other zymotic diseases have not, as far as we know, modified their characteristics, and smallpox still asserts itself with its ancient virulence whenever sanitary defects, or the prevalence of thinkers of the Colonel Wintle type, favour its development. I have no doubt that our recent small outbreak in Portsmouth would have assumed formidable proportions had it found a congenial uninoculated population upon which to fasten. In the London smallpox hospital nurses, doctors and dressers have been in contact with the sick for more than fifty years, and during that time there is no case on record of nurse, doctor, or dresser catching the disease. They are, of course, periodically vaccinated.

- What disease is Conan Doyle writing about?
- What does the work 'zymotic' mean? What would we call such diseases today?
- Why does Conan Coyle think the outbreak of the disease in Portsmouth was not as bad as it could have been?

Conan Doyle was to travel to South Africa in 1900 to work as volunteer doctor at the Langman Hospital in Bloemfontein during the Second Anglo Boer War (March - June 1900). He wrote about his medical experiences in *Round the Red Lamp* (1894) and about the war in South Africa in a pamphlet called *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Conduct* (1902). <these texts would be hyperlinked directly to the relevant section on the site>