The Bilge Pump

Vol. 12, No. 12 December, 2024

The Irregular Publication of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star

founded November, 1970

PLEASE NOTE: January 05, 2025 Meeting NOTICE

We will be conducting our next monthly meeting virtually on **January 05** at 1:00 pm central. I will send out the link for the meeting the week before the meeting. The story for the month is "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier".

Bob Katz, BSI, ASH, will lead the discussion on the story of "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier".

Our Special Guest Speaker will be playwright **David MacGregor**.

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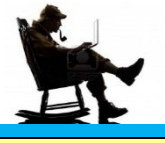

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Who dunnit: 	**Third Mate** **Helmsman** **Spiritual Advisors** **Secretary** **Historian** **Webmaster**	**Steve Mason, BSI** **Walter Pieper** **Don Hobbs, BSI** **Dr. Jim Webb, BSI** **Cindy Brown, BSI** **Pam Mason** **Rusty Mason**	**mason.steve8080@gmail.com** **waltpieper@att.net** **221b@verizon.net** **jimrwebb@ix.netcom.com** **myrkrid08@yahoo.com**

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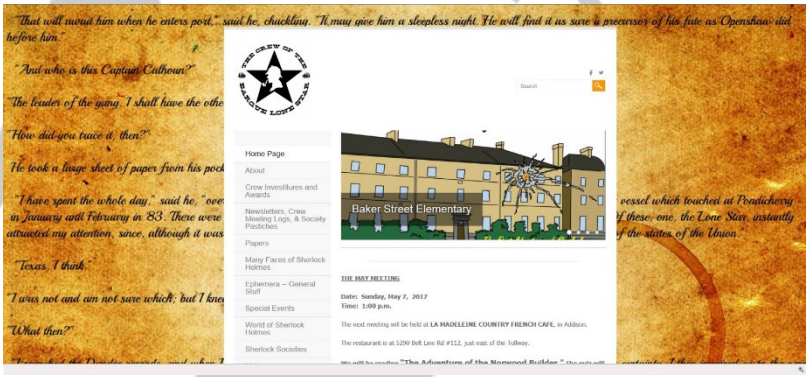

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DECEMBER 01 SUMMARY

There were **54** in attendance at this ZOOM meeting.

The Crew's meeting was opened with a toast by Ann Caddell on William Shakespeare (see page 5), which was followed by a quiz on today's story, "The Three Gables."

Our own Bob Katz then led a lively discussion of the story, beginning with the question, "why is this story so important in the canon"?

The next discussion question was, why is the female antagonist in this story different from any other villain in the Canon"?

The answers were that Isadora Klein has more dialogue than any other woman in the Canon, and her character is more clearly defined.

We then went on to announcements for the month:

Steve Mason mentioned that the latest book published by the Crew, *Mr. Holmes Neighborhood*, will soon be available on the Barnes and Noble website. Also, anyone who submitted a story for this year's publication and will be at the BSI weekend, will receive their copy in New York. Otherwise, the contributor copy will be mailed to the submitters.

Steve Doyle announced that the BSJ is being mailed this week. He also discussed the upcoming BSI Conclave which will take place in Indianapolis on April 26, 2025. This will be an official BSI event and you must be a member of a Sherlockian scion society in order to attend. This will be a one day event. Registration will open on January 2,2025.

The Bi-Metallic Question will be meeting next on December 3, and again on December 5 which will be an All About Doyle meeting.

The Legion of Zoom will be doing their annual conference on March 16, 2025.

Shana Carter mentioned that the next ASH dinner will be December 4, 2024. She also mentioned that the William Gillette luncheon will take place during the BSI weekend on Friday at noon on January 17.

Linda Cohn noted that the Torist International group will meet on December 27, in Chicago. The Torist Internation scion society is planning a conference focusing on Vincent Starrett on October 20, 2026.

The Great Alkaline Plainsmen will have its next meeting on December 21, 2024, and they will be discussing "The Blue Carbuncle."

Madeline Quinones noted registration for the John H. Watson society meeting, which will meet the Sunday before Christmas, and the Fall issue of The Watsonian is now available on Amazon.

Sandy Kozinn entertained us with a limerick based on "The Three Gables."

Rich Krisciunas led us through Sherlock Holmes Law 101.

This month's feature presentation was given by JoAnn Alberstat and was titled, "Hello Mars, ACD Spiritual Interest in Radio Pioneer Guglielmo Marconi."

Brad Keefauver then gave us a wonderful count down, of the top 10 society prejudices, and the winner was, "poor Pitiful white guy writers of the canon.

Shana Carter did a reading from the Baker Street Journal, Vol. 4, number 1, from 1949. It was titled "The Definitive Biographer".

Rich Krisciunas closed the meeting with a toast to the Crew of the Barque Lone Star.

THE SHERLOCK-SHAKESPEARE CONNECTION

Ann Caddell, Deckmate

I confess that The Adventure of the Three Gables is one of my least favorite Holmes stories, for reasons we needn't go into here. But the story contains one passing refence that immediately caught my eye: While trying to figure out why the Stockdale gang is so anxious to acquire all of the contents of the house, Holmes asks Mrs. Maberley, "You don't happen to have a Raphael or a First Folio Shakespeare without knowing it?"

This is the only place in the canon where Shakespeare is mentioned by name. It's interesting that when Holmes is trying to come up with an object that would have enormous intrinsic value – one worth overpaying for a whole house to acquire – the First Folio, that holy grail of bardolatry, immediately leaps to his mind. Of course, this sent me off on a hunt for more Shakespeare references in the canon. There are a few direct quotations scattered about.

The first quote that is immediately recognizable to anyone with even a passing familiarity with Sherlockiana comes at the beginning of the Adventure of the Abbey Grange – "The game is afoot." While Holmes only says this once in the entire canon, it has become permanently identified with him through movies, plays, and pastiches. In fact, if you asked a random sample of English speakers for the origin of this phrase, I'd be willing to bet that far more of them would say Sherlock Holmes than William Shakespeare. And yet, long before Holmes appropriated it, this cry occurs in one of the most iconic speeches in all Shakespeare – King Henry the Fifth riling up his troops at the siege of Harfleur. It's the speech that begins "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more" and ends with "I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips / Straining upon the start: The game's afoot! / Follow your spirit, and upon this charge / cry 'God for Harry, England, and St. George!" Wow. No wonder Watson was out of bed, into his clothes, and off in a cab within ten minutes.

More Shakespeare turns up in the Adventure of the Empty House. Watson is marveling at the wax bust of Holmes visible in the sitting room at 221B, and Holmes indulges in a little self-flattery: "I trust that age doth not wither, nor custom stale my infinite variety." This is a paraphrase of one of the most often-quoted lines from Antony and Cleopatra. Antony's friend is lamenting that Antony will never give up his relationship with Cleopatra: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety." Holmes is rather full of himself, isn't he?

He's also in a particularly Shakespearian mood in this story. Later on, when he collars Colonel Sebastian Moran, he quips: "'Journeys end in lovers meetings' as the old play says." He seems to especially like this quote, since he uses it again in the Adventure of the Red Circle, when he meets up with Inspector Gregson.

The "Journeys end" line appears in a song sung by Feste the clown in Twelfth Night, one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies. Holmes is giving it a bit of a twist, since these meetings are certainly not between lovers – Moran is a ruthless criminal, and Gregson,

although technically on the same side as Holmes, is still as much a rival as a compatriot. I'm sure Holmes is enjoying the irony.

No doubt there are other sly Shakespeare references in the canon that I haven't dug up yet. It wouldn't be a surprise, since the figure of Shakespeare has towered over English literature for centuries. Conan Doyle could hardly have avoided quoting him, even if he'd wanted to. So let's raise a glass to the Swan of Avon, the bard himself, William Shakespeare!

To be Duchess the lady did look.
To gain this, some chances she took.
The moral of this is
You may want her kisses,
But don't write 'em up in a book..

Sandy Kozinn, Deckmate

A DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY

Shana Carter, ASH

From the *Baker Street Journal,* Volume 4, number 1, 1949, Editor: Edgar W. Smith

BAKER STREET IRREGULARS everywhere will note with pride and wholly without prejudice the publication on February 2nd, 1949, of John Dickson Carr's authoritative biography of Sherlock Holmes's great and good friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Mr. Carr has told the story of this many-sided man—for whom, be it said, no group has a higher admiration than the Irregulars themselves—better than anyone had told it before. Carr worked from the massive documentation made available to him by the Doyle estate out of a cache of trunks and boxes which had lain untouched since Sir Arthur's death in 1930—a vast accumulation of letters, notes, diaries, commonplace books and collateral data into which had been frozen, as well as such a thing can happen, a reflection of the thoughts and deeds, the elusive purposes and emotions, of a dynamic human being.

What emerges is what a biography ought, after all, to be—the story of a man's life. Nothing is put forward, in this life of Conan Doyle, that was not already there in the man himself, for 'all to see.' Carr tells the tale for what the tale is worth.

And it is worth much; for Conan Doyle was a giant of a man in every way—a simple giant, admittedly, and a gentle one, but a giant still; conscious of his strength as it grew upon him, and boyishly eager to flex his moral and his mental muscles and to use them in every just cause. How challenging and absorbing those causes were, and how bravely this Victorian Sir Arthur drew his sword Excalibur in their defense! Each campaign he undertook became, as long as it lasted, the only thing in the world that mattered. And always he wrote— wrote—wrote, with a fervor as prodigious as his zest for life and living, and with a sense of righteousness and justice so wholesome and so profound that it bordered upon the smug.

Mr. Carr makes it abundantly clear that Conan Doyle was a great sportsman, a great patriot, a great crusader, a great writer. He was, above all, a great historical novelist: The White Company is still one of the best three or four books that have been written in its field. As Christopher Morley has said, "no printed body of modern social history either by purpose or accident contains a richer pandect of the efficient impulses of its age."

There will be, surely, no readers of the Sherlock Holmes tales who will not wish also to read this life of a man who walked and talked with Sherlock Holmes."

To subscribe to the Baker Street Journal, go to https://bakerstreetirregulars.com/the-baker-street-journal/

The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Society has published 8 wonderful books. You may download a free copy of the books (as .pdf files) on our website...

https://www.dfw-sherlock.org/society--crew-member-anthologies-pastiches.html

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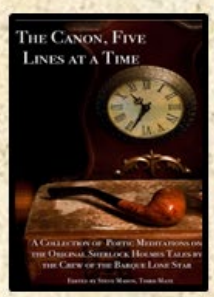

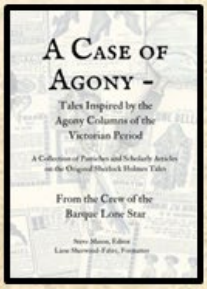

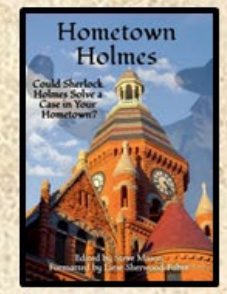

THE GAME'S AFOOT -- A LOOK AT SHERLOCKIAN GAMES

Tim Kline, Deckmate

Since Christmas is upon us with this writing. I am reviewing 2 new games that would make great Christmas gifts.

PuzzLegend is a journal pf the story of the legendary Sherlock Holmes. Progress in the story by solving a series of puzzles, which become progressively more difficult. Format of this game is a series of cards.

Decktective: Lock Up Sherlock Holmes! is the seventh game of the series.

A mysterious inscription stains the floor of 221B Baker Street.
Does it have something to do with the theft at the Royal Palace?
Is the arrest of the most famous detective of all time really the right solution? First, you must discover what has happened to Sherlock himself!

Collect the clues: documents, traces, witness statements...
...and solve the mystery!

https://www.amazon.com/Decktective-Sherlock-Holmes-Games-Strategy/dp/8894957543/ref=asc_df_8894957543?mcid=9471dd8adaa23e3894d649fb1b64fde8&tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=693598454085&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=7414635919923502778&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9026803&hvtargid=pla-2295226148319&psc=1

EROS IN BAKER STREET: THE SUBTERRANEAN SHERLOCK HOLMES

Michael Felong

"To Sherlock Holmes she was always *the* woman… In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex."(1) Indeed. For once, it appears, good old Watson struck the nail precisely on the head, though as usual, even more than he knew. There have always been a few loose ends, odd little discontinuities bobbing about in the wake of "A Scandal in Bohemia," a recent review of which prompts new speculations upon the most mysterious relationship in the Canon.

Let us take a chronological approach to the evidence, refusing (for the moment) to theorize in the absence of data.

Watson, arriving at 221B, espies Holmes' lean silhouette as he paces "swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him... He was at work again… rising out of his drug created dreams and hot upon the scent of some new problem." Odd, then, that upon presenting Watson with the mysterious letter, Holmes avers that he has formed no theories concerning it. Odd, again, that throughout the interview with Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein and hereditary King of Bohemia, the Great Detective's manner is anything but swift and eager. He chuckles at the Monarch's "pretty little problem," yawns at the news that but three days remain to acquire the damning materials, and drops the aside that he has "one o:r two matters of importance to look into at present."

Here one might add that Holmes proceeds to ignore those one or two "important" matters while taking up the pursuit of the Divine **Miss A.** If these alleged other matters were of pitch and moment, why overlook them? If not, how does one explain all the eager, swift, head-on-chest-bloodhound-upon-the-scent behavior, which we may take as genuine, since even Holmes could not anticipate that Watson would be peering at his window. Deep waters.

Deep and rather muddy. Holmes is at some pains to treat the King condescendingly throughout, allowing at the conclusion even a bit of contempt to filter through his normally courtly manner. While it must be admitted that even the most bohemian sensibility would reel at the sight of a man eighty inches tall, with astrakhan-slashed sleeves, flame coloured silk linings, and fur-trimmed calf length boots, who is unable to determine which of his interlocuters is Sherlock Holmes, we might expect that the degree of his peril and his exalted station might count for something. However, Holmes not only treats him with a relative lack of grace, but accepts without hesitation an offer of £1000 (for expenses !), later disingenuously refusing "payment" for his services. Worse, Holmes' perhaps understandable lack of cordiality is followed, in the penultimate scene, by an apparently unforgivable lapse in sagacity. Let us look at the matter more closely.

The King's difficulty lies essentially in the field of public relations: to wit, the populace must not discover his relationship with Irene Adler. Any hint of scandal might be fatal. So Holmes, apparently expecting to find Irene at home, brings the King, in full view of the ubiquitous denizens of Serpentine Mews, directly to the front door of Briony Lodge, with the (again, apparent) intention of collaring the young proprietress, invading her residence and making off with the property. One could hardly expect this plan of attack, employing not just Holmes and Watson, but a seven-foot purple cloaked figure, undoubtedly still wearing a black vizard mask, to pass unremarked in the center of London.

No. It appears that an agonizing reappraisal is required. Holmes was not acting in the King's best interest. But if not in the King's interest, then whose? Who indeed? Let us pursue some additional points of interest in the psychological landscape:

1. Holmes was not expecting Watson's first visit.
2. Holmes' first conversational sally upon Watson' s arrival refers to the state of wedlock.(2)
3. Holmes, attributing the comments without corroboration to the men of Serpentine Mews, says "She [Irene) has turned all the men's heads down in that part. She is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet."(3)

4. Irene Adler has only one male visitor he is dark, handsome, and dashi ng, never calls less than once a day and often twice. According to Holmes, this visitor is Godfrey Norton of the Inner Temple, but we have only Holmes I word for this, as no one else ever sees the worthy barrister. Indeed, a perusal of the records of the Inner Temple for the period 1880-90 reveals no Godfrey Norton in association with that august institution.(4)
5. Holmes refers to Irene Adler, somewhat condescendingly, as "this young person." While such a term was commonly used to refer to younger women, it must be pointed out that, as Baring-Gould notes,(5) Holmes was but 33, and Irene 29 at the time. Holmes seems to be at pains to emphasize to the King and Watson his superior, clinical attitude toward the suspect.
6. Consider Holmes' reading from his index of the sublime and ridiculous events in the checkered career of Irene Adler; "Hum! Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. Contralto -- hum! La Scala, hum.' Prima Donna. Imperial Opera of Warsaw -- Yes! Retired from operatic stage -- Ha! Living in London -- Quite so.'" This extraordinary performance (comprising no less than three "hums," one "yes," a "ha" and a single "quite so") coming from a man who, immediately after, appears to become completely offhand and relaxed -- even bored -- is, well, curious. From the quiet, contained, close reasoner we have come to know and love, this manic performance is highly suspicious. The casual observer of a psychiatric bent might well conclude that the man under observation, who lapses from floor- pacing deep thought to studied calm, to strained high-pitched joviality and back to boredom and lassitude again, all in the space of a few minutes, is either on the threshold of a trip to Broadmor, or perhaps Colney Hatch, or else finds himself in an acutely difficult position and is thinking fast.
7. Holmes ' account of the afternoon during which he supposedly witnessed the frentic nuptials of Adler and Norton has, alas, more holes than John Dillinger, though the presence of a somewhat scarlet lady and the background of betrayal do present some affinities. Baring-Gould informs us that by 1888 the legal period for performing ·marriage ceremonies bad been extended to 3 :00 PM. not, as Holmes cl aims Norton believed, by noon. In addition, by British law, two witnesses to a marriage are required (not just an itinerant groom staggering through the church at the right moment), the ceremonies are not over in an instant, no "informalities" are brooked, and since no banns had been published, the marriage could have been performed only via special dispensation from Canterbury.

Clearly, either the marriage was faked, or the Master was weaving a story out of whole cloth. Various wild speculations have been advanced, all of which suggest that Holmes, if not Irene herself, was taken in. All the evidence from the story, however, inclines the close reasoner to the alternative wild speculation that, rather than conspired against, Holmes and Irene were themselves conspirators. And so we see a collection of facts, insignificant in themselves, which together have a certain cumulative force. We may never know the details, but is possible to piece together an outline of what occurred.

Holmes, prior to the start of Watson's account, had encountered Irene, perhaps at a performance by Sarasate or Norman Neruda. With his acute observational powers, he evidently saw that she was "the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet." And, though he, in his quiet moments jibed and sneered, though the emotion was abhorrent to his cold, precise mind, he soon found that he had placed himself in, shall we say, a false position. The conflict between his two selves must have been acute. His whole career depended upon his freedom of action -- he knew how circumscribed Watson's activities had been since his marriage -- yet wedlock, as we have seen, was clearly impressing itself painfully upon his admirably balanced mind.

Had he been informed about Irene's Bohemian Connection? Apparently he had, but we must conclude that he did not anticipate Irene's actions vis-a-vis the incriminating evidence. This accounts for his agitation at receiving a note which he discovered was from von Ormstein, and for his confusion of modes of behavior in the interview: he knew the King's problem in advance, but was still agonizing as to the method of approach to a situation which greatly increased in intricacy by his own involvement. Thus his rather bizzare behavior. Thus his abrupt ejection of Watson, whom he had not seen for some time, because of a problem to which he had professed indifference.

His enamorata had, it seemed, resolved to throw a spanner into the smoothly-oiled gears of the King's

onrushing nuptial carriage, and had thus created a perilous situation. From what we know of the King, he would have doubtless, upon retrieving the letters, put out the Victorian equivalent of a contract on Irene, having several men with truncheons pound her to a jelly at the first available opportunity.(6) The letters could not be returned. But, in addition, Irene must leave London, or at least go underground.

And so, after a hurried and perhaps tearful conference at Briony Lodge the dark, handsome, clashing visitor (my blushes, Watson!) became Godfrey Norton, a bogus wedding story was concocted and two dramas were played out, one for the benefit of Watson, the other for the King's. It is vital in this connection to remember that in the carriage before reaching Irene's celebrated abode, and before the "discovery" of Irene's letter assuring van Ormstein of his safety, Holmes is careful to point out that she, bewitched and betrothed, will no longer try to ruin the King. The Monarch's peace of mind is essential to the preservation of Irene's famous qualities. All the smoke-bombing/purloined-letter business was intended to draw a veil over Watson's eyes, and the crowning touch was Irene's disguised "Goodnight Mr. Sherlock Holmes." Picture Holmes putting hand to mouth and saying "Mmm! Haven't I heard that voice somewhere before?", and the old campaigner falling for the ploy like the proverbial ton of bricks. Thus Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory, disappeared, and Sherlock Holmes' involvement with her remained unsuspected. The elaborate charades were necessitated both by the dangers to Irene, and by Holmes' desire to keep the affair secret. Besides the potential for embarrassment, and the King's wrath, there was the constant danger that some felon desiring vengeance might attempt to wound the Master through his loved one.

One remarks, with some diffidence, that these revelations provide fuel for yet another theory of the Great Hiatus. Where was Holmes for those three years, and what was he doing? It might be readily imagined that the Master, after the titanic struggle with Moriarty, needed a rest-cure, a time of quietude and tender loving care; perhaps some of the grace and kindliness with which Irene Adler waited upon the amiable and simple- minded nonconformist clergyman who reclined (by habit?) upon the couch in her house.

Perhaps the idyll lasted for the entire three years. Perhaps it continued, at least at intervals, long after Holmes returned to Baker Street.(7) And perhaps, on cool nights before a tire, somewhere in London, while ironical ly contemplating a dog-eared photograph of a beautiful woman and a king, two minds speculated as one upon the vagaries of fate and the mutability of men's affairs.

Notes

1) One might add, parenthetically, that Watson' s use of "eclipse" is a rather unfortunate one, suggesting that Irene's presence in one's field of vision rendered others unavailable to view; a certain bovinity, visions of tidal waves at Brighton -- though the whole things squares rather well with attempts to picture a Prima Donna of the Warsaw Opera. Perhaps one could prophecy a follow-up story delineating Irene's early career -The Adventure of the Danzig Men...
2) "Wedlock suits you…"
3) contradicting Watson's judgement of Irene's figure.
4) Records of the Inner Temple: 1880-1890. Just as well...
5) *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* p. 354. Baring-Gould discusses several attempts to sort out the problems presented by this adventure, which define most of the difficulties, but fail in the synthesis. There are now other analyses, notably Ralph Ashton's, which tread some of the same ground covered by my own presentation. Ashton's is beautifully written, and certainly on the right track, but a bit lean at some crucial points. I intend in future a more thorough consideration of this most interesting literature.
6) It has been pointed out to me that old London Bridge was one of Moriarty's favorite spots for doing-in unfortunates whose antagonists could meet his fees. This is the first recorded instance of a contract bridge.
7) Yes, Watson referred to her as the Late Irene Adler, but I strongly suspect that Holmes contrived a false death notice. Still, Sherlock may have tired of his sport. "…My dear, let us get away from London for a while. I know a lovely, restful little spot by a waterfall in Switzerland..."

Eros in Baker Street?: A Reply to Felong by Donald Pollock

As usual, Mr. Felong hides what I can only label an extremely simplistic argument behind his characteristic excess of deceptively elaborate prose. I am sorry to say, then, that it will first be necessary to "cut out the poetry" in order to expose the frangible structure and the faulty pinions of the deus ex machina he has foisted upon his readers.

Mr. Felong opens by examining certain "evidence"; facets of Watson's account which he takes to exert a cumulative force sufficient to warrant his conclusions. Let us consider the major points in more detail:

1. Holmes' behavior at the outset of the story. Holmes has clearly been involved in deep thought, yet tells Watson that he has formed no theories concerning the letter from von Ormstein. He has one or two matters of importance at hand, yet seems to ignore them while chasing the revealing photographs. Mr. Felong finds this all very suspicious, but if we assess Watson's statements from a point of view unencumbered by wild speculations, Holmes' actions emerge as quite understandable. Surely the sunken-chin pacing is over the one or two matters of note. That he has formed no theories about the letter is consistent with his refusal to hypothesize in the absence of data (a lesson Mr. Felong should note). We recall that it is only after Watson' s arrival that Holmes even determined where the paper was made... Again, Mr. Felong finds something remarkable in the apparent disregard of the important matters -- though Holmes is pleased to hear that he has three days in which to settle the Adler affair. But here again, the theory has shaped the data and blinded Mr. Felong to the more reasonable inference that Holmes' statement indicated his pleasure at having to drop the important matters for only a few days.
2. Mr. Felong's second major point concerns the account of the wedding of Irene and Godfrey Norton. The major difficulties lie in the legal aspects of that event, and it is regrettable that so many scholars have insisted on complete jural accuracy from Watson. For it was Watson who recorded the event, at least two years after at that. Even so modern an Englishman as Dakin remembers that, in his youth, the popular belief was that weddings had to take place before noon. Is it too much to assume that Watson, too, held the same belief so many years before, or that when recalling the event so long after its conclusion he inserted what he took to be the appropriate times? In this regard, let us note that Holmes left Baker Street at eight in the morning of the wedding, and that by the time of his departure for the church had rubbed down a number of horses, consumed a glass of half and half and a considerable quantity of tobacco, and had listened to the biographies of no less than seven people! Regardless of the time Watson (Watson) remembered it to be, I suspect that more than three and one half hours were spent by Holmes in the Serpentine Mews, and that the actual time of the wedding was the more appropriate three o'clock. Remember also that Holmes returned to Baker Street at almost four that afternoon… Mr. Felong furthermore concludes that the wedding did not take place at all. Though I must admit that this is an appealing suggestion, a number of. points indicate that such a theory is, at best, unworthy of Holmes' reasoning ability (though apparently not Mr. Felong's). First, the King, who had taken such pains to consult Holmes, surely would have checked the public records to insure the accuracy of the account (i.e., that Irene was in fact married). Additionally, Mr. Felong's theory still fails to account for many of the problems i n Holmes' story; for example the role of the ill-kempt groom and the supposed irregularities of the license. l, for one, do not believe that Holmes -- who had a good practical knowledge of British law -- would have lied with a story so obviously full of Dillinger-like holes, as we are glibly reminded.

I can only conclude that Mr. Felong' s "evidence" consists of little more than perfectly understandable behavior and a lapse of memory on Watson' s part (not an unknown occurrence). Indeed, I believe my comments here to have dissolved these spurious problems and fictitious explanations into the speculative mist out of which they were born. The only commendable quality of Mr. Felong's paper is that it reinterprets several aspects of the case. But we must ask ourselves if the price is not too high to pay. For it requires that Holmes become a bare-faced liar, bis client a dupe, and Watson an intruder who must be deceived! Such a theory, bordering as it does on outright heresy, needs more "evidence" than Mr. Felong bas offered. Holmes could not make bricks without straw. I am sorry to say that the man who has tried -- once the pride of Taunton, Mass. is more to be pitied than censured.

A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT 'THE BLANCHED SOLDIER'

1. Summary (Diogenes Club)

The story is narrated by Holmes. Watson is married and does not appear in the story.

James and Godfrey campaigned together during the Boer war and became fast friends. Godfrey was wounded by a round from an elephant gun. He survived but was discharged to his family home, Tuxbury Old Park. Tuxbury Old Park is a large place with a spacious old manor house and a vast park with numerous out-buildings and cottages.

James received letters from Godfrey every few months until the war ended and he too was discharged, about a year later. James returned to London and resumed his profession of stockbroker. The letters from Godfrey stopped.

James wrote to Godfrey three times at Tuxbury. The first two letters were unanswered; the third received a terse reply from the Colonel saying Godfrey had gone on a tour around the world and would not be back for at least a year.

James then wrote Godfrey's mother. This letter received a prompt reply which warmly invited him to visit Tuxbury and reminisce about Godfrey. Naturally, he accepted.

He was given a room on the ground floor and late in the night, while reading, he saw Godfrey with his face pressed against the window. Godfrey's face was fish-belly white. When he got up from his chair, Godfrey ran away. James tried to follow him but lost him in the darkness.

The next night, James went exploring and came upon a snug cottage. He peered in the window and saw a little man with a beard reading a paper and a large man who had his back to the window. He was sure this large man was Godfrey, although he did not see his face. At this point the colonel clapped him on the shoulder, upbraided him for snooping into private affairs and ordered him from the property.

James consulted Holmes who immediately solved the case.

Holmes returned to Tuxbury with James and Mr. Saunders. They persuaded the colonel to allow Saunders to examine Godfrey.

Immediately after he was wounded, Godfrey wandered about and after night-fall, came upon a large house where he spent the night. In the morning he learned he had spent the night in a leper colony. Soon after he began to get blotches on his face.

Saunders proclaimed Godfrey's illness to be Ichthiosis and not leprosy as all had feared. Ichthiosis is disfiguring but neither infectious nor fatal.

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2. Story Info Sheet (McMurdo's Camp)

- First published in:
  Liberty, October 16, 1926; The Strand Magazine, November 1926

- Time frame of story (known/surmised):
  January 7, 1903, given

- Holmes & Watson living arrangements:
  Holmes was alone. Watson had at that time deserted him for a wife, which Holmes characterized as "a selfish action".

- Opening scene:
  This story was written by Holmes himself, not by Watson, as was "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane" (LION). Client called upon Holmes, who then demonstrated his powers of observation and deduction, noting that he felt it wise to impress clients with a sense of power.

- Client:
  Mr. James M. Dodd, a big, fresh, upstanding Briton, and a gentleman of virile appearance with such tan upon his face as an English sun could never give. Dodd said he had been awake all night puzzling his brain.

- Crime or concern:
  Client's army chum was Godfrey Emsworth, son of the V.C. Colonel Emsworth. Godfrey was wounded in action in the Boer War and after one letter, Dodd never heard from him again. After the war, back in England, Dodd tried to contact his old mate, but

the father and family would give only a short and gruff reply, stating Godfrey was travelling and would be gone for a year. Dodd was skeptical and went to visit to find out first-hand where his friend had gone. The Colonel expressed his view:

"Many people, Mr. Dodd, would take offence at your infernal pertinacity and would think that this insistence had reached the point of damned impertinence." Then the Colonel asked to be left alone.

Later that night, the butler, who loved Godfrey, but spoke of him in the past tense, expressed the idea that Godfrey would be better off dead. Dodd concluded it was a piteous business. Then he looked up and saw Godfrey through the window, looking deadly pale; then Godfrey ran off and disappeared into the night. Dodd looked for him, was later caught "spying" and was sent away by the angry host.

- Villain:

  Probably no villain, depending on your point of view. Just a major misunderstanding of a medical condition.

- Motive:

  Godfrey and his family believed he had contacted leprosy, so he withdrew from society and was hidden away at the family estate, lest he be sent to a leper colony and confined.

- Logic used to solve:

  There were few difficulties in its solution, for a very limited choice of alternatives was available to get to the root of the matter. Holmes reached the solution as an armchair detective, employing the process that starts upon the supposition that when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Criminality, lunacy, or disease were the possibilities, and the first two did not make sense. Leprosy was the least improbable.

- Policemen:

  The colonel threatened to call the county police to kick Holmes and Dodd out of his house, but Holmes pointed out that any police interference would bring about the very catastrophe which he wished to avoid.

- Holmes' fees:

  No mention.

- Transport:

  Holmes and Dodd picked up the elderly Dr. Saunders, the noted dermatologist, on their way to Euston Station, then took train down to Bedfordsire. Saunders was an old friend of Holmes, and a grave and taciturn gentleman of iron-gray aspect.

- Food:

  The butler, Ralph, carried a basket of food down from the main house to the lodge where the client suspected Godfrey was held.

- Drink:

  None mentioned

- Vices:

  During his initial interview with the client, Holmes lit his pipe and leaned back in the chair.

- Other cases mentioned:

  A case which Watson had described as that of the Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved. (Some find this to be a puzzling reference. It sounds like the Priory School and the Duke of Holderness. Was Holmes mixed up, or did he have two cases with similar descriptions?)

  A commission from the Sultan of Turkey which called for immediate action, as political consequences of the gravest kind might have risen from its neglect.

- Notable Quotables:

  "Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances." – Holmes

  "It is my business to know things. That is my trade." – Holmes

- Other interestings:

Both of the stories written by Holmes himself (BLAN & LION) turn on medical points which Watson might have understood before Holmes would have figured them out.

Col. Emmsworth was a gaunt, fierce old giant, with a red-veined nose which jutted out like a vulture's beak, and two fierce gray eyes. Not only that, but he had tufted brows.

- When all was said and done:

Holmes brought with him the great dermatologist, Sir James Saunders, an austere figure. Sir James determined that the disease was not really leprosy, but was a well-marked case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis, a scalelike affection of the skin, unsightly, obstinate, but possibly curable, and certainly non-infective. This was such good news that Godfrey's mother fainted upon hearing it.

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3. Data! Data! Data! (Frank Mentzel)

- Publishing History
  # 56 of the 60 stories
  First published in The Strand Magazine, November, 1926
  In the US Liberty Magazine, October 16, 1926
  Part of The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes collection
  John Murray, London, 1927
  George D. Doran, New York, 1927
  British illustrator – Howard K. Elcock

- Chronology

Baring-Gould places the dating of the story as Wednesday, July 7 to Monday, Jan 12, 1903 making it 55th of the 60. This means that Holmes is 49 and Watson 51.

- Christopher Morley Says

"Sherlock himself writes this story, partly to show Watson how he thinks it ought to be done; and also because "the good Watson had at the time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action I can recall in our association." It is presumed, however, that this was Watson's second selfishness. Holmes's own account of the pale-faced soldier is a grievous anticlimax; nothing else could have shown us how much he owed to Watson's charm as a writer."

- Dummies Short Summary

"James Dodd wasn't worries when he didn't hear from his friend Godfrey for over six months. But when he's told that Godfrey is taking a cruise around the world, he doesn't buy it, especially when he sees Godfrey looking in his window at night. This is the first of two stories to by Holmes instead of Watson."

- How Many Words
  At 7,755 words BLAN has the 26th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

- Classifying This Case
  This case is one of fear of persecution because of the fear of disease.

- The Best Of Sherlock Holmes
  BLAN is near the bottom of the pile on most lists.
  - 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not have it on his list of 12 favorites.
  - 1959 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 57th of the 60 stories.
  - 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 53rd of the 56 short stories.
  - 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 55th of the 56 short stories.

- What Else Happened That Year (1903)
  Just for the heck of it, here is one item each month since I had a six page list

- Jan 2nd - Pres T Roosevelt shuts down post office in Indianola Miss, for refusing to accept its appointed postmistress because she was black
- Jan 7th - Start of Sherlock Holmes "Adventure of Blanched Soldier"
- Jan Feb 22nd - Due to drought the US side of Niagara Falls runs short of water
- Feb 23rd - The US and Cuba sign an agreement by which Cuba releases Guantanamo and Bahia Hondo to the US for naval stations
- Mar 22nd - Niagara Falls runs out of water because of a drought
- Mar 23rd - Wright brothers obtain airplane patent
- Apr 14th - Dr Harry Plotz discovers vaccine against typhoid (NYC)
- Apr 20th - 7th Boston Marathon won by John Lorden of Mass in 2:41:29.8
- Apr 29th - Limestone slides at Turtle Mountain kill 9 (Frank, Alberta) visits San Francisco
- May 20th - Britain's House of Commons begins a debate on the charges of poor administration and ill treatment of natives in Belgium's colony in the Congo Free State
- May 29th - May coup d'etat: Alexander Obrenovich, King of Serbia, and Queen Draga, are assassinated in Belgrade by the Black Hand (Crna Ruka) organization.
- Jun 10th - In Belgrade, Yugoslavia, a military coup d'etat- led by the Queen's brother-in-law and other offices - kills King Alexander I of Serbia, Queen Draga, and many officers
- Jun 16th - Pepsi Cola company forms
- Jun 16th - Roald Amundsen commences the first east-west navigation of the Northwest Passage by leaving Oslo, Norway.
- Jul 1st - 1st Tour de France bicycle race begins
- Jul 17th - The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party meets, first in Brussels and then London because their leaders have been forced into exile by the Russian Government
- Aug 2nd - Unsuccessful uprising of Macedonians against Turkey
- Aug 4th - Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto of Venice elected Pope Pius X
- Sep 9th - 6 km long Engadin-railroad tunnel of Switzerland inaugurated
- Sep 15th - Queen Wilhelmina calls railroad strikers "criminals"
- Oct 1st - 1st baseball World Series, Pittsburgh Pirates vs Boston Pilgrims (Red Sox)
- Oct 10th - The Women's Social and Political Union was formed by Emmeline Pankhurst to fight for women's rights in Britain.
- Nov 3rd - Colombia grants independence to Panama
- Dec 9th - Norwegian parliament votes unanimously for female suffrage
- Dec 13th - Wright Bros make 1st flight at Kittyhawk
- Dec 16th - The Taj Mahal Palace & Tower hotel opens its doors to guests

- Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Holmes is living alone at Baker Street. Watson had, at that time, deserted him for a wife, which Holmes characterized as “a selfish action” Big Question - - Is this Watson’s 2nd wife? maybe 3rd?

- Dramatis Personae
  - James M. Dodd, recently of the Middlesex corps of the Imperial Yeomen.
  - Col. Emsworth, retired from the army
  - Godfrey Emsworth, his son and former comrade-in-arms of Dodd during the Boer War.
  - Old Ralph, long-time butler in the colonel's household.
  - Ralph's Wife, she nursed Godfrey.
  - Mr. Kent, personal physician to Godfrey.
  - Sir James Saunders, prominent dermatologist.
  - Baldy Simpson and Anderson, soldiers who were with Godfrey when he was wounded.

- Quotable Sherlock

Only one notable quote and it has been used in other tales

  - “When you have eliminated all which is possible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

- Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

Ready? This story has NEVER been put on a screen. Not by Eille Norwood. Not by Jeremy Brett. Not by Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century. Rate it one half of a star.

- Fainting In The Canon
  In this tale, Godfrey Emsworth and Mrs. Emsworth both actually faint.

- Newspapers
  Spectator - One of more esteemed papers and was weekly and solidly behind the Unionist cause (opposed to self government for Ireland)

- Annotated Sherlock
  - . . . "stoep" South African Dutch for a covered platform or veranda at the door of a house. (in Baltimore, we still use the term "stoop" for the same thing)
  - . . . "a bit of barney" an argument, a quarrel
  - . . . "subaltern" the most junior commissioned officer

- Weapons
  - Elephant Gun - Which was used by a Boar in South Africa to wound Godfrey Emsworth.
  - Rifles - OF the Boars, from the range of which Emsworth pulled James Dodd.
  - Threat - Made on the life and health of James Dodd by an indignant and somewhat choleric Colonel Emsworth.

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4. Case Inquiries (Alexander E. Braun)

Vol. XIV No. 55 • October 17, 2024

"The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier" was first published in Liberty Magazine in October and The Strand Magazine in November 1926. It is part of The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes.

The Canon being uniquely (and atypically) specific in this instance, all our chronologists agree upon 1903 as the year in which the case took place. In 1903, Sherlock Holmes was 49 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 47.

- Main Characters:

James M. Dodd, young veteran of the Boer War. Godfrey Emsworth, another veteran of the same war and a close friend of Dodd's. Colonel Emsworth, retired distinguished army colonel and Godfrey's father. Mrs. Emsworth, Godfrey's mother. Ralph and wife, long-serving butler and housekeeper respectively, of the Emsworth family. Mr. Kent, Godfrey's unskilled attending physician. Sir James Saunders, eminent specialist in skin diseases.

- Notable Quotes:

The ideas of my friend Watson, though limited, are exceedingly pertinacious. For a long time he has worried me to write an experience of my own. Perhaps I have rather invited this persecution, since I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures.

Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would like to take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquires it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances.

He has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances. A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.

The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone.

I have found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power.

"I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see."

"It is my business to know things."

"When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

- Of Dubious Canonicity?

A few Canon scholars have presented powerful arguments to the effect that there exist strong doubts that this story–as well as LION, next week's case–were actually written by Sherlock Holmes. Some have suggested that both BLAN and LION are not up to our sleuth's capabilities, hypothesizing that a third party, possibly using facts supplied by Holmes, wrote BLAN. The consensus is, however, that the whole story may be pure invention. Among other facts, they point out that someone like the Great Detective would have been quite familiar with the effects of firearms, including elephant guns.

Rightfully so, it is further argued that considering all the cases antedating the Great Friendship, as well as those which, although mentioned were never revealed to the public at large, he would have far more interesting ones to write about. This is why scholars like Baring-Gould as well as Dakin insist that this story and LION must have been written by someone else.

The arguments upon which this disbelief is based are substantial. For example, they cite Holmes' apparent confusion when he refers to the case of the "Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved." Yes, it might be possible that our sleuth referred to a startlingly parallel, unpublished case involving a different school and another duke; otherwise, one would be forced to conclude that his memory had mysteriously become unreliable.

And yet, considering the clarity with which he related to Watson his experiences with Reginald Musgrave and Victor Trevor, it appears inconsistent that Holmes would have written such a muddled account.

A more apt explanation is that this case was written by someone unsure of the chronology of the cases of Sherlock Holmes. Another equally major objection to this story's Canonical authorship lies in Holmes blaming Watson's marriage as the reason that the Good Doctor did not do the writing. This, of course, stirred yet another controversy: was Holmes careless with his own dates or did Watson marry a second time?

In situations such as this, it is useful to refresh one's memory regarding some Canon story statistics. In general, scholars are generally in agreement that two of all these cases, LION and BLAN, were written by Sherlock Holmes himself. Two others, MUSG and GLOR, were authored by Watson using notes directly provided to him by our sleuth, and yet another two, MAZA and LAST, are the product of some unidentified "third-person" narrator. The remaining vast bulk has doubtlessly been penned by Doctor Watson.

Although my Canonical scholarship ends a few parsecs away from that of those whom I have quoted, I tend to differ from their conclusions.

To begin with, Holmes' comment that he has "found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power" rings true, just as does his remark, "I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see." Also, Holmes' comments regarding the manner in which Watson tells a story and his other "meretricious" ways sound solidly Holmesian–we've heard such comments before. His jeremiad about the difficulties in writing one's own story also rings true.

Here we witness a Holmes without his Watson to tell us how nearly supernatural his sleuthing abilities were and censor some of his attitudes towards clients.

We all know that in his efforts to show Holmes as being well above the rest of us mortals, Watson would often leave out or ameliorate some aspects of his friend's personality and would, in fact, go as far as to make himself appear denser than he really was, in order to better showcase the Great Detective's abilities.

It is puzzling that Holmes would view Watson's (second?) marriage as a desertion considering that he does not appear to have felt that way in the case of Mary Morstan. Then, again, they hadn't been together that long back then, and later the absence might have been more sharply noticed. There can be no question that, for all his wonderful abilities and great heart, Holmes was extremely self-absorbed.

Here, however, although Sherlock Holmes comes through as still Sherlock Holmes, he does so in a more human version. His comment about Watson's sole act of selfishness shows how much he misses his friend and biographer, and how lonely he feels.

An Ottoman Aside

When Holmes told Dodd that was clearing up the "Abbey School" case, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved, he also added that he had a commission from the Sultan of Turkey which required immediate action to avoid political consequences of the gravest kind.

Going by the case's date, Holmes would have been engaged by Abdul Hamid II, the last absolute ruler of the Ottoman Empire, whose faithful (and terrorized) subjects lovingly referred to as "Abdul the Damned."

Abdul came to the throne by deposing his brother Murad V, who was rumored to have been insane. He ruled from 1876 to 1909, and among the several other things that endeared him to the Western World was his use of pan-Islamism to solidify his internal absolutist rule and to rally anti-West Muslim opinion outside the Ottoman Empire, thus creating difficulties in the Muslim colonies of the European imperial powers. He savagely suppressed a Bulgarian uprising, and his successes in Serbia and Montenegro aroused the indignation of Western powers and Russia.

After a disastrous war with Russia he decided that little good could be expected from the West, so he dismissed the Parliament and suspended the constitution. For the next 40 years, he ruled in seclusion from his Yildiz Palace (in Constantinople), assisted by a system of secret police, an expanded telegraph network, and severe censorship.

Discontent with Abdul the Damned's despotic rule and resentment against European intervention in the Balkans finally led to the military revolution of the Young Turks in 1908. He was deposed, and his brother was proclaimed sultan as Mehmed V; as such, he reigned but did not rule.

Whatever service could Holmes have performed for such a despotic Eastern Potentate?

Godfrey Emsworth's Disputed Wound

Once more I raise a tattered banner found on a stricken field, to forensically examine Godfrey Emsworth wound, which he claimed had been inflicted by "a bullet from an elephant gun in the action near Diamond Hill outside Pretoria."

It is true that most of the Boer forces were best described as militia, which meant they often fought with their personal weapons, not standard-issue guns as is the case in the regular military.

Back then, big game hunting was an acceptable pursuit and ownership of various shotgun/rifle types were developed for use on the largest land mammals was not unusual. Many of these were basically shotguns with rifled barrels. However, some of the double-barreled ones could be described as being more cannon than gun, weighing, on average, 20 or more pounds (≈9 kilograms). These fired shotgun-style shells that instead of regular buckshot propelled a single massive lead bullet. The recoil of such a weapon was terrific.

Considering all this, how likely is it that after having been wounded on the shoulder by a weapon capable of such a stunning impact, Godfrey would have remained mounted on his horse and gallop "several miles before I fainted and rolled off the saddle." Even if miraculously his upper torso had not been instantly turned into something resembling what one finds between two buns with a slice of cheese on top, the bleeding resulting from such an injury should have been fatal. Had he been mistaken and was been shot with something of a considerably lighter caliber, say a .45 caliber handgun, the resulting wound would have instantly plunged Godfrey into shock and he would have bled at a hæmorrhagic level, all of which would have been enough to kill him practically instantly.

So, although Godfrey was very specific regarding the kind of weapon that wounded him, he had to have been mistaken in identifying it as "an elephant gun."

For those interested in a somewhat whimsical treatment of the hunt for truly large land animals with a solid discussion of powerful hunting weapons, I recommend the 1956 science-fiction story, "A Gun for Dinosaur" by American writer L. Sprague de Camp, which tells the story of four men who travel into the past to hunt a T. rex.

The Ludicrous Diagnosis

It is practically impossible to understand how poor Godfrey could have been diagnosed with leprosy. Even if he had gone to a physician and gasped, "Ye gods, I've leprosy–help me!" such a diagnosis would have been improbable. Thankfully today leprosy is a rarity. Any doctor who suspects a patient of suffering from such a hideous illness would have had no problem in identifying and diagnosing it. However, this was even more probable back during the time in which this case took place; the disease was endemic in many of the British colonies. Like elephantiasis, cases of soldiers and civil servants who spent time in such stricken areas and returned afflicted with leprosy although uncommon were not unusual. Although the disease itself is not highly contagious there were leprosariums in England as well.

If true, Kent's claim to having "the ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man" should have been adequate where it comes to recognizing leprosy. It seems apparent that his diagnosis was overwhelmingly based upon Godfrey's revelation that he had spent the night on a leper's bed rather than on a thorough diagnostic examination.

In the Bible's Leviticus 13 there is a plethora of varied instructions on how to identify the disease, including a period of quarantine to see what develops. From all this, it would seem that some 3,400 years ago the ancient Hebrews' grasp of leprosy handily surpassed Kent's "ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man."

And even if he had persisted in his diagnosis, eventually the malady's usual (and its medically well-documented) progress alone would have been a giveaway that his patient was not afflicted by the disease

Certainly, Watson would never have rendered such a diagnosis!

Sir James' diagnosis of Godfrey's condition as ichthyosis is also somewhat flimsy. This condition manifests itself in widespread and persistent thick, dry, "fish-scale" skin. The malady has some 20 different variants and it is inherited or acquired during adulthood. Symptoms of the inherited version appear at birth or within the first year of life.

Acquired ichthyosis generally develops in adulthood and is usually associated with other conditions, such as an underactive thyroid, kidney disease, or Hodgkin's lymphoma. Because we are not told whether Godfrey had exhibited any of these symptoms before, it is not fully certain that this was what was truly ailing him.

In none of the sources I consulted was there any reference to the disease causing white blotches or in any way mimicking leprosy. Sir James' optimistic revelation that Godfrey's affliction was, "A well-marked case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis, a scale-like affection of the skin, unsightly, obstinate, but possibly curable, and certainly noninfective," was also quite extraordinary,

because this would have meant that his dermatological abilities surpassed even those of professionals of our own time, because still today ichthyosis has no known cure.

A Gentleman Ranker?

Dodd said that, "When I joined up in January, 1901–just two years ago–young Godfrey Emsworth had joined the same squadron. He was Colonel Emsworth's only son–Emsworth, the Crimean V. C.–and he had the fighting blood in him, so it is no wonder he volunteered. There was not a finer lad in the regiment. We formed a friendship–the sort of friendship which can only be made when one lives the same life and shares the same joys and sorrows. He was my mate–and that means a good deal in the Army. We took the rough and the smooth together for a year of hard fighting."

From the above one must conclude that Dodd and Godfrey enlisted as plain soldiers, not officers. It seems strange that men of their class and education would not have received a commission; especially in Godfrey's case, who was the son of such a distinguished officer.

This prompts several questions about Godfrey. For example, why did his father not wrangle a commission for his son? Did the young man join against his father's wishes? Perhaps Godfrey rejected a commission because he wanted no special treatment and joined purely out of patriotism, thus refusing to emulate his father.

Although by the time of the Boer War officers' commissions were no longer for sale in the British Army, just as we did in both World Wars, England had its own version of the "90-day wonder"; that is, educated young men who went through an accelerated course in some sort of an Officer Candidate School and hatched out as lieutenants.

There seems to be little doubt, from all his efforts to shield his son that the elder Emsworth loved his son, yet it seems he might have intervened on his behalf when Godfrey decided to go and fight in the Boer War.

What else happened in 1903:

Empire

Britain and France agree to settle disputes through International Court at The Hague.
Coronation Durbar for Edward VII, King-Emperor, at Delhi.
British expeditionary force sent to Tibet.
Alaskan frontier question between Canada and U.S. settled by arbitration.
Exchange of visits between London and Paris; Arbitration Treaty establishes Entente Cordiale.

Britain

Joseph Chamberlain begins Tariff Reform Campaign.
Women's Social and Political Union formed to demand votes for women.
Foundation of universities at Liverpool and Manchester.
Establishment of Workers' Educational Association.
GRW introduces early motor-bus service from Helston to the Lizard; the initiation of bus services largely originates from railway companies.
Wyndham's Act–Irish landlords to be bought out; peasant ownership; repayments over 68-and-ahalf years.
Road speed limit in England increased to 20 mph.

World

Dutch Democratic Labor Party formed; general strike suppressed by troops.
Russia refuses to evacuate Manchuria under terms of Russo-Japanese Convention.
Mursteg Program–Austro-Russian proposals to solve Macedonian problems fails.
Belgium introduces Old Age Pension plan.
Foundation Bank of Persia loans with large Russian interests.
Alexander Obrenovitch and Queen Draga of Serbia assassinated; Peter Karageorgevitch elected king.
Russian massacre of Jews at Kishinyov.

Art

Barrie writes his play, *The Admirable Critchon*.
Degas, Dancers in Yellow Skirts.
First recording of an opera, Verdi's *Ernani.*
Elgar, *The Apostles*, an oratorio.
German, *A Princess of Kensington, operetta*.
Pisarro, *Bridge at Bruges*.
Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, a semi-autobiographical novel of middle-class life is published posthumously.
Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*.
Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands*, a novel.

Shaw, *Man and Superman*.

Science and Technology

First radio press messages published by *The Times*.
Orville and Wilbur Wright make their first flight in a heavier-than-air machine.
Tsiolkovski publishes paper on astronautics.
Henry Ford founds his motor company.
Bertrand Russell publishes Principia Mathematica.
Wilhelm Einthoven invents the electro-cardiograph.
J.J. Thomson publishes *Conduction of Electricity through Gases*.
Phenobarbitone, a long lasting sedative, developed.

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5. Selected Chronologies

a.	The Original Story by Arthur Conan Doyle	January, 1903
b.	William Baring-Gould	Wednesday, January 07, 1903
c.	H.W. Bell	January, 1903
d.	Roger Butters	January, 1903
e.	Jay Finley Christ	Wednesday, January 07, 1903
f.	Jean-Pierre Crauser	Wednesday, January 07, 1903
g.	D. Martin Dakin	January, 1903
h.	Bill Dorn	Monday, January 12, 1903
i.	Henry Folsom	January, 1903
j.	John Hall	January, 1903
k.	Craig Janasek	Wednesday, January 07, 1903
l.	Brad Keefauver	Wednesday, January 21, 1903
m.	Toshio Suzuki	Wednesday, January 07, 1903
n.	June Thomson	January, 1903
o.	Ernest Bloomfield Zeisler	Wednesday, January 07, 1903

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6. Canonical Queeries (Ralph Edwards, BSI)

- Are the ideas of Holmes exceedingly pertinacious?
- What were examples of Watson's superficiality?
- In this case, where was Holmes superficial or pandering?
- How does this case compare with others as to strangeness?
- Can a "burden" be an 'ideal helpmate'?
- Were Watson's previous marriage periods unselfish?
- How were the chairs placed for evening visitors?
- What beard would a "regular" have?
- What is the "cut of a riding man"?

- Would a guest be provided with estate stationery?
- With brokerage fees as his true aim, did Dodd hoodwink Holmes?
- Was the Colonel the sort to let his wife have her own correspondence?
- What part of the House was Ralph as old as?
- Would a single ship devote a year to go round the world?
- Could the Emsworth family have put off Dodd more effectively?
- Was Dodd inept in not making Ralph more sympathetic to his cause?
- Wouldn't Godfrey's breath immediately fog the window?
- Did a vision problem require Godfrey's face to press upon the glass?
- Is strolling back to the house consistent with getting the Holmes message mailed?
- What time did it get dark in January?
- How does body posture indicate melancholy?
- Would thirty minutes allow for the five miles and two interviews?
- Wasn't Watson unmarried at this time of the Abbey School matter?
- Were the lepers angry because of Godfrey's uniform?
- Who is Lord Roberts?
- Did the idea of a faulty diagnosis originate with Holmes or with Sir James?
- Was Sir James ahead of his time in thinking of autosuggestion as a cause of illness?
- With telephones available, did Holmes minimize his time – and his fee?

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7. 17 Steps (Brad Keefauver, BSI)

1. The Watson We Never Knew

"Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion I my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances."

When Holmes says "characteristics," he surely isn't just speaking of Watson's constant surprise at Holmes's actions -- that alone can't be remarkable enough to mention. Was Holmes keeping Watson's remarkable traits as quiet as Watson himself did? Why might they have been, something along the lines of "the fair sex is your department"?

2. Of Collections And Relative Strangeness

Holmes says this case is "among the strangest happenings in my collection, though it chanced that Watson had no note of it ihis collection."

Does this case seem all that strange to us? Perhaps what is strange to Holmes may not be strange to Watson's readership . . . what would the difference be? Is Holmes patronizing us a bit by acting like this is such a weird case, feeling he had to ballyhoo it a bit in Watson's absence?

And what were the differences between Holmes's collection and Watson's collection? Holmes seems to imply that Watson kept notes on cases that the good doctor had no part in, and even makes it sound like he was checking those notes in Watson's absence before writing up BLAN. Did Watson's collection stay with Holmes when Watson left, possibly because it had become a part of Holmes's criminal data stores?

3. That Old Sunlight Trick

"It is my habit to sit with my back to the window and to place my visitors in the opposite chair, where the light falls full upon them."

Was Holmes doing this to provide light for his observations or add a sense of power to his presence? Is it just a coincidence that Professor Moriarty is said to have the same habit in VALL? And we are also told that Moriarty would shine a lamp in the face of his guest if it was night -- would Holmes have done that as well?

4. The Sherlock Holmes Effect

Holmes has made several amazing deductions in his career, but by 1903 it would seem that his clients are a little too eager for them. Take the case of Mr. James Dodd:

"What has been happening at Tuxbury Old Park?"

"Mr. Holmes-- --!"

"My dear sir, there is no mystery. Your letter came with that heading."

Was Dodd that much of a bonehead, or was he just expecting brilliant observations so much that he forgot he sent Holmes a letter? Had Holmes's legend started causing such conversational irritants whenever Holmes talked to a fan who hadn't met him before? (We see later than Dodd is a reader, using a novel to distract himself -- might he have heard of Holmes via Watson's work?)

5. An Echo Of Earlier Events

James Dodd tells Holmes: "We formed a friendship--the sort of friendship which can only be made when one lives the same life and shares the same joys and sorrows. . . . Then he was hit with a bullet from an elephant gun in the action near Diamond Hill outside Pretoria. I got one letter from the hospital at Cape Town and one from Southampton. Since then not a word--not one word, Mr. Holmes, for six months and more, and he my closest pal."

This tale takes place in January of 1903, just before Watson brought Holmes back to the reading public with HOUN and then revealed Holmes still lived with EMPT.

The Dodd-Emsworth break seems a bit close to the Holmes-Watson break of ten years before, doesn't it? Is Holmes trying to tell Watson something with his choice of tales?

6. And What Was So Queer About Mrs. Ralph?

". . . there was his wife, who might have been older. She had been Godfrey's nurse, and I had heard him speak of her as second only to his mother in his affections, so I was drawn to her in spite of her queer appearance."

Dodd says old Ralph the butler seemed as old as the house, and his wife seems older. Does looking old qualify one for a "queer appearance"? Or is there something else Dodd (or chronicler Holmes) has left out?

7. The Roaring Coal Fire

"Then I sat down by the roaring fire with the lamp on a table beside me, and endeavoured to distract my mind with a novel. I was interrupted, however, by Ralph, the old butler, who came in with a fresh supply of coals."

Okay, here's one that puzzles someone ignorant of the low-tech olden days. Why was Ralph bringing coals when there was a roaring fire in the fireplace? Was it stoked with coal rather than wood? Or does "coals" plural imply hot coals of some sort brough in for another purpose?

8. Jim Dodd's Favorite Cheese

"It wasn't merely that ghastly face glimmering as white as cheese in the darkness."

Ask most modern Americans the color of a man's face that's the same color as cheese and they'll surely say "yellow." If Dodd's first thought of cheese is of a white cheese, what kind of cheese is he most likely thinking of? What was the common cheese of Victorian England?

9. Locking Emsworth's Outbuilding

Dodd remarks of the man we later learn is Emsworth's doctor: "To my surprise, he locked it after him and put the key in his pocket."

Is he locking Emsworth in? The night before his patient seemed to have free run of the grounds. Was Emsworth's liberty taken from him for attempting to see his friend?

10. The Longest House-Call Ever

"Opposite to me was seated the little man whom I had seen in the morning. He was smoking a pipe and reading a paper."

We later learn that this man is Mr. Kent, a surgeon who was prepared to stay with Godfrey Emsworth. What good would Kent's constant presence have done for a man with leprosy? Wouldn't a reputable surgeon have other demands on his time and ambitions beyond sitting around a moping leper, reading the paper and smoking his pipe? Couldn't a servant handle the job?

11. Of Watson, Schools, And Dukes

"It happened that at the moment I was clearing up the case which my friend Watson has described as that of the Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved."

Here's a classic Canonical puzzle: the case Watson described as that of the Priory School, in which the Duke of Holdernesse was so deeply involved, took place in May of 1901, at a time when Watson is seemingly at Baker Street. Is this just one of life's odd coincidences? (As Sir James Saunders says, "Yes, Mr. Holmes, the coincidence is a remarkable one. But is it coincidence? Are there not subtle forces at work of which we know little?") Must a thorough Sherlockian reconcile the two slightly different cases as one?

Was there still matters in the earlier one that needed clearing up two years later?

12. The Sultan's Concerns In England

"I had also a commission from the Sultan of Turkey which called for immediate action, as political consequences of the gravest kind might arise from its neglect."

What might the Sultan of Turkey have been interested in that could be dealt with in London of January 1903? As Holmes is working the Greyminster case and is back on the Dodd case the beginning of the next week, he didn't really have time to travel much, did he?

13. "Dear Diary, Today I Found A Fake Leper . . ."

Holmes writes, "Therefore it was not until the beginning of the next week, as my diary records . . ."

With all the other things Holmes has going on, he's keeping a diary too? What level of detail would we expect to find in Holmes's diaries? What topics might he cover? Would it be all business, or would innermost thoughts and feelings be recorded therein?

14. That Nasty Bit Of Business Called The Boer War

"We were clearing brother Boer . . ." Godfrey Emsworth remarks.

By "clearing" would Emsworth mean anything but killing Boers?

15. The Attitude Of The Lepers

"In front of me was standing a small, dwarf-like man with a huge, bulbous head, who was jabbering excitedly in Dutch, waving two horrible hands which looked to me like brown sponges. Behind him stood a group of people who seemed to be intensely amused by the situation . . ."

The situation seems to be rather a "three bears" situation in which Emsworth is found sleeping in the bed of the big-headed dwarf, who is rightly upset by the situation. The dwarf's fellow lepers seem vastly amused that Emsworth is in the dwarf's bed and not his. Yet the whole lot are speaking the Dutch of the Boers . . . what would their attitude have been toward a British soldier in their midst? When the English-speaking doctor says "I'll soon have you tied up" does he refer to Emsworth's wounds, or just to tying up an enemy soldier?

16. The Fate Of An English Leper

"But absolute secrecy was necessary, or even in this quiet countryside there would have been an outcry, and I should have been dragged to my horrible doom," says Godfrey Emsworth.

What, indeed, would have been the fate of an Englishman discovered to have leprosy in the heart of the English countryside? Was it indeed a "horrible doom" at the hands of a mob or was Emsworth speaking dramatically of segregation in a leper colony somewhere?

17. It's Just Not The Same Without A Cheering Section

"And here it is that I miss my Watson. By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systematized common sense, into a prodigy."

How humble is Holmes being here? Are Watson's statements of amazement so integral to a Holmes adventure? Wouldn't something like SPEC or REDH have been just as exciting without them?

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8. View Halloas (Rosemary Michaud)

The Hounds have just concluded a week in which the question of Canonical authorship has been debated very earnestly, and it is certainly tempting to explain the varied quality of the Casebook tales by suggesting that some or all of them were written by persons unknown. “The Blanched Soldier” is a particularly easy target for suspicion because it is purportedly written by Holmes, which is unusual, and because it is not a very good story, which is regrettable. But if we completely dismiss this tale as non-Canonical, we risk making any discussion of its text a pointless exercise. Therefore I hope that all good Hounds will at least provisionally accept the premise that “The Blanched Soldier” was written by Sherlock Holmes, not only so that we have enough to talk about on the list this week, but also so that we don’t deprive the good Watson of his wife! Next up: a few comments and questions on the story of the week, plus a naughty theory of my own.

Try it yourself, Holmes: It’s odd that Holmes should have written “The Blanched Soldier” so badly, when his accounts of “The Musgrave Ritual” and “The Gloria Scott” are wonderfully readable and exciting. Are we to believe that in his “declining years” Holmes forgot how to tell a story, or can we deduce that Watson must have done some heavy editing of Holmes’s previous accounts?

Or is it possible that Holmes was simply a better storyteller when he was unselfconsciously telling the tale to Watson than he was when he took pen in hand to write the case down? Is "The Blanched Soldier" so badly done because Holmes was making a clumsy attempt to imitate Watson's style?

Holmes has been criticized for choosing this story to write when there must have been many more interesting cases in his notes. What purpose might Holmes have had in bringing this particular tale to light? Was he simply trying to dispel the rumors of the strange goings-on at Tuxbury Old Park?

Fathers and sons: Why do you suppose that Godfrey Emsworth joined the army as an enlisted man instead of an officer? (I believe he would have been called a "gentleman ranker" in those days.) Wouldn't the wealthy scion of a retired officer have been much more likely to be an officer? Is there something fishy here, or was Godfrey's military career at least partly intended to defy and annoy his bullying father?

Ralph the butler intrigues me. He is so much more affectionate towards Godfrey than the young man's own father. Is it possible that Godfrey's mother found Ralph to be a sympathetic partner at some point when the Colonel was off with his regiment? Was Godfrey actually Ralph's son? Is this the real reason for the antagonism between Colonel Emsworth and Godfrey?

Is it likely that any medical man would mistake a case of ichthyosis for leprosy? Did cranky old Colonel Emsworth encourage Mr. Kent to come up with a discouraging diagnosis as a way of controlling Godfrey? Was there a Copper Beeches type of dirty work afoot at Tuxbury Old Park?

What do you think of Holmes's involvement in this case? If he suspected leprosy all along, do you agree with his methods of verifying his theories? What do you think would have happened if Godfrey truly had leprosy?

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9. Delicate Questions (Chris Redmond, BSI)

Essential to a clear understanding of "The Blanched Soldier" is its background in the events of the South African War, which was recent history, if not still news, when it was published in 1926.

Are there other Canonical stories that depend on the reader's awareness of current affairs to the same degree?

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10. Additional Thoughts (Steve Clarkson)

Danger and the threat of death forge strong bonds of friendship. So it was with James Dodd and Godfrey Emsworth, who faced the rifles of the Boers as comrades-in-arms. Godfrey was seriously wounded in battle and sent to a hospital, whence he returned to his father's home in England for further convalescence. It was only natural for James to wish to visit his friend after his own return home. But there was a problem: communications from Godfrey had abruptly stopped after he left the hospital, and efforts to contact him at his father's home were frustrated by Godfrey's father — the curmudgeonly Colonel Emsworth, who brusquely informed James by letter that Godfrey was traveling for his health and could not be contacted.

James prevailed upon Godfrey's mother to invite him to Tuxbury Old Hall, where he was once more informed by Godfrey's father that his son was traveling for his health and could not be reached. Imagine James' surprise, then, when he saw Godfrey peering in at him through the bedroom window one night. Godfrey's physical appearance was strange, and it was as though his skin had been bleached to a ghostly white. James tried to find where Godfrey was staying, or being confined, only to be ordered off the property by Colonel Emsworth. Puzzled and disturbed, James sought the help of Sherlock Holmes.

This story is rather different in a couple of respects: it doesn't involve any crime, and it is one of the few written by Holmes. Holmes seems to have used the opportunity to chastise Watson rather severely, saying, "A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous…" (Dangerous? To whom, and how?) He continues, "…but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate." (A helpmate? Or a foil?) A little farther on, Holmes criticizes Watson for being "selfish" in taking a wife. Now, really!

BLAN strikes me as Doyle's effort to present a case in clinical terms; as the instructional "classroom" exercise Holmes so often advocated. The problem, as Doyle quickly discovered, is that a lecture isn't necessarily interesting. Pedantic classroom presentations can result in the students falling asleep. Hence, there comes a time in this story when Doyle, through Holmes, laments, "And here it is that I miss my Watson." So do we all.

Holmes did well to let Watson write most of the stories. Either Holmes is referring to an unchronicled case, that of the "Abbey School" which involved the "Duke of Greyminster," or he had forgotten that it was the Priory School and the Duke of Holdernesse. Could it be that Holmes' vaunted memory was wont to slip a little over such trifles? One would think that he would tend to remember PRIO, if only because he received his largest recorded monetary fee in that case.

Holmes writes, "It was by concealing such links in the chain that Watson was enabled to produce his meretricious results." In the first place, Watson didn't conceal the so-called links, he just didn't understand their significance until after they were explained

to him. And "meretricious" is a word derived from the Latin word for "prostitute," and means to attract attention in a vulgar way. Is Holmes mistaking Watson's wonder and admiration for vulgar showmanship?

James Dodd says, "…I knew that [Godfrey Emsworth] was heir to a lot of money, and also that his father and he did not always hit it off too well." What is the relationship between these two disparate facts? Had Godfrey already come into his inheritance, or was this a reference to what he could expect to inherit from his father's estate?

If Godfrey's mother was a co-conspirator in the sequestration of her son, why did she take the risk of bringing Dodd down to Tuxbury Old Hall? She is described as "a gentle little white mouse of a woman," and I marvel that she took so bold a step without consulting her domineering husband first. (If she had consulted him, I very much doubt that he would have given his approval.)

And a couple of bits and pieces: what is "the cut of a riding-man," and what kind of disinfectant has a tarry odor? And why did old Ralph have to wear gloves just to fetch Godfrey's meals, while apparently, Mr. Kent wore none?

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11. Questions & Comments (Sonia Fetherston, BSI)

The horror of illness and the power of friendship are central to our next account, The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier. My questions and comments this weekend:

The color white is a powerful cultural symbol representing many things, initiation and surrender being only two examples. What things might white symbolize in this particular story?

Would you rather be a guest at Colonel Emsworth's house for a weekend…or would you rather have James M. Dodd as a guest in your own home for a weekend? Think carefully now!

Why would the Emsworth family retain Mr. Kent, when a much better-qualified consultant like Sir James Saunders was present in England?

"I miss my Watson," Holmes admits at one point. I do, too! But perhaps other Hounds disagree and don't mind dispensing with the good doctor now and then?

Watson is sometimes foggy about dates, but Holmes is specific: James and Godfrey joined the army in January 1901. I looked at my own city's newspaper for that month and year to learn more about those 31 days. There were many articles about politics and conflict in South Africa, but to be honest with you, it was the other news that month which captivated me. In China, the new year began with the army on full alert, mistaking celebratory gunfire for a Boxer uprising. A baby princess, Isabelle, was christened in Paris. Major Walter Reed achieved an 80 percent success rate inoculating Cubans against Yellow Fever.

The United States Congress considered stripping southern Blacks of their right to vote. In Nice, police arrested Russian Prince Victor Nakadchivez on charges of nihilism and plotting to take the life of the Tsar. Bloodshed and insurgency rocked the Philippines almost daily. Carrie Nation and her temperance ladies were jailed in Wichita after vandalizing two saloons in slightly less than 10 minutes. Twenty-six little children perished in an orphanage fire in Rochester. In Belgium, Queen Marie Henrietta was seriously ill with bronchitis, while in England Queen Victoria, that certain gracious lady, died surrounded by her family. An American capitalist offered to buy the Baker Street and Waterloo Underground from the faltering London & Globe Finance Corp. And interestingly enough in light of this week's story, a news item from Honolulu reported that the bodies of two suspected lepers were found dumped in a nearby rock quarry. Maybe Godfrey was right when he worried about being dragged off to a horrible doom?

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12. 56 Stories in 56 Days (Charlotte Anne Walters)

For the first time, Holmes takes up Watson's challenge and writes the story himself, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

The story is written in the first person and is Holmes' attempt to write up the details of a case himself, rather than have his exploits trumpeted by Watson's words. He does admit to criticising Watson's accounts for being too superficial and sensational rather than just sticking to the facts. Trying to do it himself however, does force Holmes to confess that it is more difficult than he thought and that a degree of superficial information is needed in order to interest the reader. How pleasant it is to hear him make this u-turn and give Watson a little credit for the works which did so much to bring details of his career to a wide audience.

But this pleasing observation is then somewhat ruined by what I have always found to be a rather upsetting and disappointing statement. Holmes sets out to explain his association with Watson and basically tells us that the union is devoid of sentiment on his part and more practical than emotional – 'I would take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances'. So, in summary, he didn't really care much for Watson but let him tag along because he was useful – or at least that's how he makes it sound.

I have never really known what to make of this statement. All the evidence contained within the other stories contradicts it and suggests that Holmes cared greatly for Watson in spite of his general disinclination for friendships. So why say it? I can't really

answer that myself but welcome suggestions – it's almost as if he is ashamed of spending time with someone out of sentiment and feels the need to justify it with a practical reason.

Also of interest is that Holmes tells us Watson has 'deserted' him for a wife. The year is 1903 so this must be the doctor's second wife, and yet we know absolutely nothing about her. This is one of the many unanswered questions I try to tackle in my own novel and I'd love nothing more than to talk about the how-and-why of it but don't want to spoil the surprise for those yet to read it.

As to the rest of the story of the blanched soldier, it is certainly an imaginative one. A fit and healthy young soldier gets wounded in the Boer war and accidently spends the night in an unmade bed at a leper hospital. He returns home to England and starts to develop white patches on his face. Presuming them to be the mark of leprosy and in fear of him being forever segregated, his parents hide him in an outhouse. A fellow soldier is concerned that he has not heard from his friend and visits his family home to seek him out. The cover story that the young man has gone on a round-the-world voyage is dismissed and he goes to Holmes for help.

All ends well when Holmes uncovers the truth and, very kindly, takes along a specialist who declares that whatever afflicts the boy, it is not leprosy after all.

I do really like the narrative but it is interesting to note that for all his criticism of Watson's writing, Holmes' account runs along in the same sort of formula with all the usual Watson-esque embellishments. And that cold declaration about his lack of sentiment or caprice for Watson does rather spoil things for me.

Only a 7 out of 10 for this one from me I'm afraid.

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13. Observance of Trifles (Brian Keith Snell)

All of us have thought, "I can do X better than he" at some point in our life.

It's part of human nature, to apprise our own skills more highly than those of another, even if we don't actually have any evidence or experience to back that up.

But when it come time to put brush to canvas, as it were, well, it can be a rude awakening.

Which brings us to The Adventure Of The Blanched Soldier.

Many, many times, Sherlock Holmes has criticized John Watson's written accounts of their cases. Well, the shoe is on the other foot, now, and the results are not exactly to Holmes' credit.

Let's step back to the real world, for a second, away from the "gentle fiction." Of course Holmes and Watson aren't real. So the decision to have Sherlock take up the pen himself comes squarely down to the creator and author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Nearing the end of his 40-year run on the character, Sir Arthur should be commended for trying to keep things fresh and interesting, to shake up the formula. It would have been remarkably easy to coast at this late point in his life, as he approached his 70th birthday. You merely have to travel to a modern bookstore to see how many series of crime fiction continue on and on, with no real changes to the basic premise, and a cookie cutter approach to each new novel. Or, a "co-writer" is hired to do most of the actual work while the creator keeps his name in large print and continues to rake in the bucks.

So props to Doyle. Why not, in your 52nd Holmes short story, try something new, by having Holmes himself narrate? Why not shake up the formula a little bit?

That leaves us two questions, I think, outside of the quality of the mystery itself (which I will try to tackle below).

First, does Sir Arthur do a good job of altering his usual writing style, to make it convincing that a different "author" "writing" this story? Secondly, does leaving Watson aside turn out to be a good choice for storytelling purpose?

As to the first question, I think the answer is a resounding "yes." The prose and narrative style Doyle employs here is quite different than that he used when Watson was the putative author. Take, for example, the very first line of the story: "The ideas of my friend Watson, though limited, are exceedingly pertinacious."

Well, that's just not a sentence you would hear Watson writing, is it? Aside from the vocabulary, that's just not the way John Watson would start a story, is it? Watson might express a similar thought, but only as a way of trying to justify his decision why to write up the current mystery, or to give us a greater picture of the subject of his admiration, Sherlock Holmes. And think about this:

Perhaps I have rather invited this persecution, since I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures. "Try it yourself, Holmes!" he has retorted, and I am compelled to admit that, having taken my pen in my hand, I do begin to realize that the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader.

While Watson passed along Holmes' opinion often enough, it was almost never to defend himself, but to illuminate Sherlock. And it rarely came in the story's preamble. But here Holmes, rather than introducing the actual tale, instead of leading us into the mystery, is writing about writing! And making himself the subject, something Watson was loathe to do when he had the writing reins.

Another way that Doyle makes Holmes' writing differ from Watson's is by having Sherlock's be much less descriptive, especially

of people. When Dodd arrives at Baker Street, for example, Holmes describes him thusly: "I had my visit from Mr. James M. Dodd, a big, fresh, sunburned, upstanding Briton." That's it! Watson would have taken at least two more sentences to fully describe Dodd's physical appearance.

Another example: When Holmes finally meets the colonel, all he gives us is "bristling beard and twisted features, as terrible an old man as ever I have seen." Contrast with the way Dodd had described Emsworth much more interestingly, as "a huge, bow-backed man with a smoky skin and a straggling gray beard, seated behind his littered desk. A red-veined nose jutted out like a vulture's beak, and two fierce gray eyes glared at me from under tufted brows." The latter is obviously a much more Watsonian description, but Holmes seems to pass along such information only when transcribing the words of other people.

So, if you were to ask my humble opinion, Sir Arthur does a fine job of differentiating between Watson as biographer and Holmes as autobiographer. But does that work for a Holmes story?

There are two major ways that it fails. First, the drier, less descriptive prose of Sherlock Holmes is far less interesting to read than Watson's. Holmes may have felt that all of the extraneous detail (and humanity) that Watson included in each tale was distracting. But as I have noted here before, Watson gave us a sense of time, a sense of place, a window in to the culture of the era. Holmes is utterly uninterested in such details, unless they're key to solving his mystery, and so he gives them little attention. It may be more direct, but it is far less involving, far less immersive then the stories as Watson told them.

The second, and perhaps more important, is that Watson, by his mere presence, was able to pace a story better, and keep thee tale as a whole flowing.

For example, Watson would often question Holmes about his theories of the case. And even when Holmes chose to be cryptic, still the interplay between the characters was worth reading...and even when being deliberately vague, Holmes would give us some clues to his insights.

In Blanched Patient, though, without Watson to banter with, Holmes takes being opaque to heights that hurt the readers' interest. Once he's solved the case, before even getting up from his chair, this is all he gives the reader:

Such was the problem which my visitor laid before me. It presented, as the astute reader will have already perceived, few difficulties in its solution, for a very limited choice of alternatives must get to the root of the matter. Still, elementary as it was, there were points of interest and novelty about it which may excuse my placing it upon record. Dry, dull. Not a hint of what he's thinking. It's tough for the audience to "play along" with the author when the author shows no interest in playing whatsoever. Holmes says, "The narratives of Watson have accustomed the reader, no doubt, to the fact that I do not waste words or disclose my thoughts while a case is actually under consideration." But that's not true at all!

If Watson had been along, the doctor would have offered some theories, which Holmes would shoot down with explanations that enlightened the reader; or Watson would have expressed befuddlement, and Holmes would have remonstrated him while offering "teasers" about what he thought were the important clues. When Watson was present, Sherlock was interested in trying to teach him, to bring him along with his thought processes, which helps the reader.. Without Watson, Holmes shows not the least interest in helping the reader along.

And frankly, as a writer Watson was better at pacing a story, at breaking up the large expanses of exposition that began many a Holmes story. When Dodd tells his tale, it goes on forever--11 pages of nearly uninterrupted, monologued exposition. And, to quote Holmes from elsewhere in the story, "here it is that I miss my Watson. By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systematized common sense, into a prodigy." We don't get the questions or ejaculations, or Watson's narrative on how he feels about the tale that is being spun in front of him. There is no nudging, no pressing for additional details (except "what newspaper was it?"), no description of Holmes' demeanor during the interview. This is where Watson's presence is missed the most, because he would have broken up this massive block of dictation for us, and presented this as a story, and not as unbroken testimony. (This happens, albeit to a lesser extent, at the end, when young Emsworth tells his story in yet another long unbroken monologue.)

So, for this story at least, the use of Holmes as "author" is a bit of a failure. While Doyle does a fine job of presenting the story as if Sherlock had written it, that style is so bereft of pacing, of dramatic flow, of interaction between characters, it reads more like an overlong treatise than a mystery story. We can applaud the attempt, while thinking the results were perhaps much more lackluster than Sir Arthur would have liked.

OTHER TRIFLES AND OBSERVATIONS:

**So the first story without Watson, and you decide to do a "medical" mystery?!? *Face palm*

Not that there's anything inherently wrong with the medical mystery. Heck, the hero of the television series House, M.D. was based on Sherlock Holmes.

But--and this is entirely my personal predilections--I don't really care for "medical" shows. You know how some people have a problem with Star Trek "technobabble"? Well, that's pretty much how a medical-jargon based mystery feels to me--all the terminology might as well be Greek (or Klingon), and makes my eyes glaze over. Again, that's just my personal tastes. But it proves a

double disadvantage in this case. In an episode of House, you have the head doctor constantly debating the meanings of symptoms and what could be causing them with his colleagues. So at the very least, the medically unenlightened (me!) can follow along. But in Blanched Soldier, there is none of that back and forth, none of that discussing and dismissing of theories. Holmes keeps all the cards to himself...he won't even tell us that the gent he brings along is a doctor, so we don't even know that it's a medical mystery to begin with!!

So when Holmes pulls out the solution at the end--it's leprosy!!--it feels like a cheat, a magic trick akin to his unveiling of cabby as the killer in Study In Scarlet, something that comes completely out of left field, without any basis in what we've read so far. It feels more like a feat of prestidigitation than a series of deductions, because Holmes (and Doyle) choose to keep everything from the reader until the end.

I'll accept an argument that contemporary readers might have been more aware of leprosy, and thus would have been better able to follow along with Holmes. But for modern readers? Literally the only clues we're given is that Emsworth served in South Africa, and his brow was terribly pale. I don't expect every mystery to be a "play fair," but that's asking too much of us.

So, not such a good mystery, I think...

"Oh, it's not leprosy, is "pseudo-leprosy," which is not contagious and it's curable" sure as ** sounds like a risible, made-up happy ending, doesn't it?

It is often my lot to bring ill-tidings and seldom good," said he. "This occasion is the more welcome. It is not leprosy." "What?" "A well-marked case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis, a scale-like affection of the skin, unsightly, obstinate, but possibly curable, and certainly noninfective.

But ichthyosis was commonly referred to as pseudo-leprosy in the medical literature of the era, so it's not completely out of left field to use that description. Although, as Sir James Saunders noted, it was quite a coincidence that a man suspected of contracting leprosy would actually contract ichthyosis, which isn't really related. And the explanation that maybe Emsworth psychosomatically gave himself the wrong disease?

But is it coincidence? Are there not subtle forces at work of which we know little? Are we assured that the apprehension from which this young man has no doubt suffered terribly since his exposure to its contagion may not produce a physical effect which simulates that which it fears?

The less we think about that, the better off we are, I think...

**Holmes: "The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone."

I try not to spend too much time worrying about chronology, or Watson's marriage(s).

But almost every Sherlockian agrees that Watson's marriage to Mary Morstan happened more than a decade before this story was set. So if Watson has married again--or for that matter, if he is still married to Mary, and she has just returned from somewhere--this clearly cannot be the first time that Watson has "deserted" Holmes, selfish or not.

Or was Watson fudging dates even more significantly than we had thought?

**Holmes has quite a compliment for Watson...

Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances.

But then he has to go and turn it into a left-handed compliment, or even an insult:

...A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.

Oh, Sherlock...

**One advantage of having Sherlock as our narrator is that we can get actual confirmation of some of his motives for how he conducts his interviews.

For example, "It is my habit to sit with my back to the window and to place my visitors in the opposite chair, where the light falls full upon them." and "I have found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power, and so I gave him some of my conclusions."

**Dodd's initial reason for concern:

He was my mate -- and that means a good deal in the Army....I got one letter from the hospital at Cape Town and one from Southampton. Since then not a word -- not one word, Mr. Holmes, for six months and more, and he my closest pal...He was a good lad, and he would not drop a pal like that.

Hmmm. I know Holmes is (theoretically) transcribing what Dodd says. But given Sherlock's earlier lamentations about Watson's "deserting" him, do I detect a bit of a jibe at Watson, who did "drop a pal?"

**Dodd: "Tuxbury Old Hall is inaccessible -- five miles from anywhere. There was no trap at the station, so I had to walk, carrying my suitcase, and it was nearly dark before I arrived."

I know that, to the older Emsworth, Dodd was an unwelcome visitor. But making a guest walk five miles, while carrying his own luggage?!? How very unspeakably ill-mannered! Surely that would have lead to unwelcome gossip and hurt the family's reputation!

Of course, the colonel had no problem providing a trap when he kick Dodd out...

**Dodd again: "There was a butler, old Ralph, who seemed about the same age as the house, and there was his wife, who might have been older. She had been Godfrey's nurse, and I had heard him speak of her as second only to his mother in his affections, so I was drawn to her in spite of her queer appearance. The mother I liked also -- a gentle little white mouse of a woman. It was only the colonel himself whom I barred."

Perhaps it's just speculation, but Dodd seems only to like those he perceives as non-threatening...or easily cowed? Problems with authority?

**Dodd describes Emsworth's suspicious demeanor:

'Well, sir,' said he in a rasping voice, 'I should be interested to know the real reasons for this visit.'

"I answered that I had explained them in my letter to his wife. "

'Yes, yes, you said that you had known Godfrey in Africa. We have, of course, only your word for that.'

Again, this may seem unbelievably rude for the era.

Although, given some of the crazy schemes we've seen con men and thieves uses to get access to houses that we've seen in the Canon, can we really say that the old man is wrong to be so untrusting?

**Upper class insults: 'Many people, Mr. Dodd,' said he, 'would take offence at your infernal pertinacity and would think that this insistence had reached the point of ****ed impertinence.'

Oh, snap!!

**Top melodrama:

" 'Listen,' I said. 'You are going to answer one question before you leave if I have to hold you all night. Is Godfrey dead?"

"He could not face my eyes. He was like a man hypnotized The answer was dragged from his lips. It was a terrible and unexpected one. " 'I wish to God he was!' he cried, and, tearing himself free he dashed from the room.

** Fair enough theory, given the lack of medical knowledge, and Holmes refusing to share anything whatsoever:

"Clearly my poor friend had become involved in some criminal or, at the least, disreputable transaction which touched the family honour. That stern old man had sent his son away and hidden him from the world lest some scandal should come to light."

Holmes dismisses that:

No unsolved crime had been reported from that district. I was sure of that. If it were some crime not yet discovered, then clearly it would be to the interest of the family to get rid of the delinquent and send him abroad rather than keep him concealed at home.

Well, perhaps. But what if it were a non-local crime that had been committed--something elsewhere in England, or during his travels home, or even in South Africa--that was the reason his family was trying to conceal him?

**The shame of leprosy:

There was something shocking about the man, Mr. Holmes. It wasn't merely that ghastly face glimmering as white as cheese in the darkness. It was more subtle than that -- something slinking, something furtive, something guilty -- something very unlike the frank, manly lad that I had known. It left a feeling of horror in my mind.

Just the thought that he had leprosy made Geoffrey "slinking, furtive and guilty."

**Holmes: "It happened that at the moment I was clearing up the case which my friend Watson has described as that of the Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved."

Wait, is Holmes referring to The Adventure Of The Priory School? But Watson was clearly a bachelor and living in Baker Street then: "We have had some dramatic entrances and exits upon our small stage at Baker Street, but I cannot recollect anything more sudden and startling than the first appearance of Thorneycroft Huxtable, M.A., Ph.D., etc."

Most chronologists place the Priory School in 1901, and Holmes definitively tells us that this case takes place in 1903. So is he referring to the same case? Are the Abbey School and the Duke of Greyminster really Priory School and the Duke of Holderness? Are there some issues from that case that still needed "clearing up" two years later? Or is this some other case entirely? And if so, how was Watson involved, if he had "abandoned" Holmes?

**Another apocryphal case: "I had also a commission from the Sultan of Turkey which called for immediate action, as political consequences of the gravest kind might arise from its neglect."

**And one more untold tale: "I was able once to do him a professional service, and he is ready to advise as a friend rather than as a specialist. His name is Sir James Saunders."

**A typical Holmes trick, this time with the master narrating his moves rather than Watson:

I have, as my friend Watson may have remarked, an abnormally acute set of senses, and a faint but incisive scent was apparent. It seemed to centre on the hall table. I turned, placed my hat there, knocked it off, stooped to pick it up, and contrived to bring my nose within a foot of the gloves.

**Despite Holmes' reputation, detectives were clearly held is disrepute.

Emsworth: "As to you, sir," turning upon me, "I extend the same warning to you. I am familiar with your ignoble profession, but you must take your reputed talents to some other field. There is no opening for them here."

Ignoble? Snap again!!

**Of course, if the colonel were so knowledgeable about what detectives do, he wouldn't have been so surprised by Holmes figuring out the truth..."How do you know?" he gasped, sitting down heavily in his chair. "It is my business to know things. That is my trade."

** "Well, it's not a long story to tell," says Geoffrey.

But it takes another 3 pages of uninterrupted exposition!! Man, this story is nothing but pacing problems!!

**Odd weather description, as apparently a cold day in South Africa is worse than a cold day in London (or Michigan): "You remember the kind of numb cold which used to come at evening, a deadly, sickening sort of cold, very different from a crisp healthy frost."

**Given what he thought he had contracted, you'd think that Geoffrey could have been a little bit more sympathetic in his description of others so afflicted:

In front of me was standing a small, dwarf-like man with a huge, bulbous head, who was jabbering excitedly in Dutch, waving two horrible hands which looked to me like brown sponges. Behind him stood a group of people who seemed to be intensely amused by the situation, but a chill came over me as I looked at them. Not one of them was a normal human being.

Every one was twisted or swollen or disfigured in some strange way. The laughter of these strange monstrosities was a dreadful thing to hear.

**Sherlock's description seems a far cry from Dodd's panicked "ghostly" and "ghastly" and "as white as cheese":

His appearance was certainly extraordinary. One could see that he had indeed been a handsome man with clear-cut features sunburned by an African sun, but mottled in patches over this darker surface were curious whitish patches which had bleached his skin.

Not to make light of ichthyosis, but that really doesn't sound nearly as horrifying as Dodd described...

**Well, at least the family hired a doctor?

Under pledge of secrecy, Mr. Kent, who is a surgeon, was prepared to stay with me...

May I ask, sir, if you are an authority on such complaints, which are, I understand, tropical or semi-tropical in their nature?"

"I have the ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man," he observed with some stiffness.

Geez, at least get a specialist to look at him?? Especially since his diagnosis was, well, really wrong? Was the family shame so bad that they couldn't at least get a, well, good doctor?

**Geoffrey: "But absolute secrecy was necessary, or even in this quiet countryside there would have been an outcry, and I should have been dragged to my horrible doom."

Really? You're expecting a lynch mob? Well, maybe. I can't speak to the general British populace's (or authority's) fear of leprosy in 1903. But we've been told how isolated the estate was--5 miles from anything else! Was he any more of a treat to public health than typhoid or cholera patients?

**See, it wasn't just Watson making that up: "That process," said I, "starts upon the supposition that when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

** Good to know: "It is not illegal, however, to keep a lunatic upon private premises so long as there is a qualified person in attendance and that the authorities have been duly notified."

I wonder if that's still the case...

**Of course, when one is afraid of torch-wielding villagers or the like, you have to wonder how impressed they'll be by "it's only pseudo-leprosy!!" Which is probably the reason the term fell out of favor. Still, it's hard to see the Emsworth's fear of medical shaming allowing even the "safe" ichtyosis diagnosis to be made public...