The Bilge Pump

Vol. 13, No. 01 January, 2025

The Irregular Publication of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star

founded November, 1970

PLEASE NOTE: February 02, 2025 Meeting NOTICE

We will be conducting our next monthly meeting virtually on **February 02** 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 Lion's Mane".

Bob Katz, BSI, ASH, will lead the discussion on the story of "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane".

Our Special Guest Speaker will be **Rudy Altergott, BSI**.

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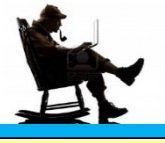

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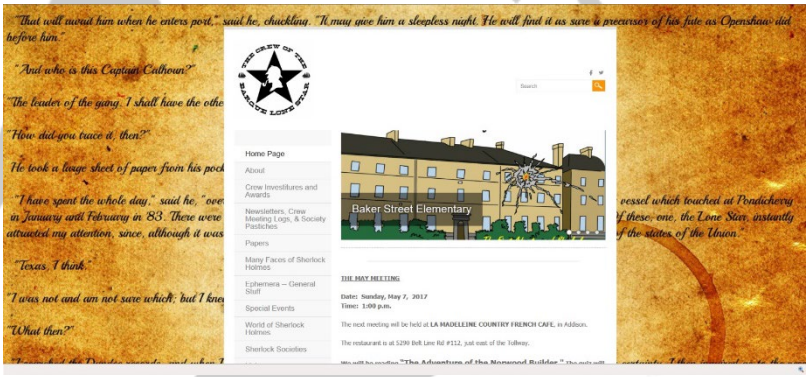

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JANUARY 05 SUMMARY

There were **87** in attendance at this ZOOM meeting.

The meeting was begun with an opening toast by Ann Caddell, to the Two friends who never die.

We then moved on adjusting our agenda, to welcome our special guest **Nicholas Meyer, BSI,** and **Glen Miranker, BSI**. They jumped into a conversation that included both their early encounter with Sherlock Holmes and how it has evolved in their lives. For the next 45 minutes the attendees were in rapt attention to their conversation.

The next item on the agenda was the discussion of this month's story, "The Blanched Soldier," led by our very own **Bob Katz, BSI**. The questions he used to start his discussion was: based on your emotion, who needs Dr. Watson, and how does this story work without Dr. Watson?

We then went to the announcements from the viewers, beginning with:

The Crew's 9th book will soon be available on Barnes and Noble. The title is *Mr. Holmes Neighborhood*.

The 10th book will be published next year.

Marsha Pollock announced the Scourers and Molly McGuires will be meeting on Jan. 26.

Steve Doyle announced that the next *Baker Street Journal* is coming out now. Check your mailbox.

Also, the *Sherlock Holmes Review* is coming out and will be available in the Dealers Room in New York City, during the BSI weekend.

On April 26, 2025, the first BSI Conclave will be held in Indianapolis, IN. This will be a focus on how to revive our Sherlockian societies. It will be a networking meeting.

Jonathon Andy Basford noted that on January 24, the meeting of the Harpooners of the Sea Unicorns will be held.

Rob Nunn mentioned that the Beacon Society will meet on Monday, January 6.

Shana Carter announced that the Gillette Luncheon will be held on Wednesday Jan. 17, in New York City.

Edith Pouden mentioned that on Feb. 6, the Bi-Metallic Question will meet, and All About Doyle will meet on March 11.

Also, on March 16, there will be the 4th annual Legion of ZOOM conference.

We then moved onto this month's limerick by Sandy Kozinn.

Next, our featured presenter for the month **David MacGregor** gave a wonderful presentation on writing a Sherlockian stage

play. We are all very anxious to see his next play.

Brad Keefaver, BSI, as presented by **Rob Nunn, BSI**, gave us the Canonical Top Ten for "The Blanched Soldier."

Shana Carter gave a reading from the Baker Street Journal, from 1952, Volume 2, number 4.

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

NEW YEAR'S 221B

Ann Caddell, Deckmate

Here dwell together still two men of note
Who never lived and so can never die.
But does their world seem ever more remote,
As one by one, the years go rushing by?
No, these two friends are never far away.
The game's afoot; their spirit has not flown.
We hear the distant view-halloo today
As clear as when Victoria held the throne.

The changing years don't change this fabled street.
A yellow fog still shrouds the windowpane.
The hansom cab continues on its beat;
The gas lamp still shines ghostly in the rain.
A new year dawns - for us - but they survive,
Where it is always eighteen ninety-five.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Though Holmes first thought it a cat,
McPherson's pain wasn't from that.
When it turned out the thing
Was a Lion's Mane sting
A boulder then crushed the thing flat.

Sandy Kozinn, Deckmate

THE KINDRED SOULS

Shana Carter, ASH

From the *Baker Street Journal*, Volume 2, number 4, 1952, Editor: Edgar W. Smith

There was a man once - a well-rounded, earthy, generously-sophisticated man - who was not interested in Sherlock Holmes. He never beat his wife, and he went to church every Easter, and his breath was as free of halitosis as his coat-collar was innocent of dandruff - but he thought the Baker Street Irregulars were a bunch of silly, grown-up children. He was sane as a sage and sound as a dollar; but when he heard talk of hansom cabs and gasogenes and deerstalker caps his mind tottered and he became violently ill.

Yes, there was such a man once: but, as far as we can determine, only once.

For it is characteristic of the well-rounded, earthy, generously-sophisticated man, somehow, to be interested in Sherlock Holmes; to see eye-to-eye with the Baker Street Irregulars in their strength-giving foibles; and to find in the scene and the age which the Canon recalls a great and sympathetic solace, as deep and as real as it is difficult to identify and define.

Not all, of course, who are capable of manifesting this characteristic have, in fact, brought it to fruition - but that, we like to think, is because they have not yet happened to discover the happy possibilities that a true Sherlockian devotion holds. But certainly it is they who have the potential for such devotion - and there are not many others who do.

You will find, among the people you meet, a certain few who have the capacity to live beyond the harsh unrealities that circumscribe them, in contrast to the others who do not. It is those who have this capacity-whose perceptiveness is just a little fuller, whose imaginations are just a little more rife - to whom the things we talk and write about will have appeal.

It is to them, the saner and the sounder of the lot, we must feel, that an avenue will open up - an avenue not of "escape," if you please, but of discovery: an avenue that leads to brighter views, and happier things, and to the satisfaction of an inner impulse that will not be denied.

Those people - the well-rounded, the earthy, the generously sophisticated - are destined by their natures to seek some such avenue that will take them into themselves. Ours may be only one of many; but we think, as we have the right to think, that it is the broadest and the straightest and the best.

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

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

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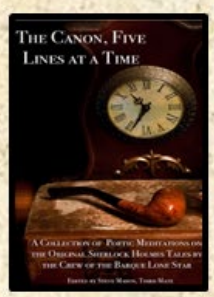

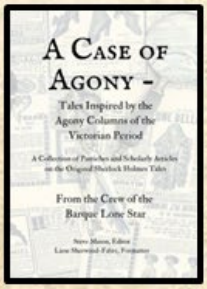

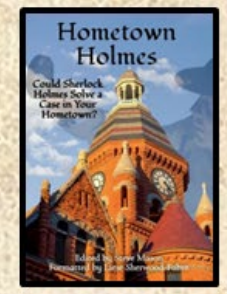

LEPROSY IN THE CANON

Franklin Saksena M.D., BSI

Leprosy is mentioned as a possible diagnosis of Emsworth in the story "The Blanched Soldier." Holmes noted Emsworth had been kept in isolation since leaving S. Africa in 1902, had a blanched face, was tended by a servant who wore gloves whenever he brought his food to an outhouse, and was attended by a physician. It turned out this was not the correct diagnosis according to the skin specialist Holmes brought with him. The reader may be interested in knowing something about leprosy.

It was first described in India in the 2nd millennium BC. There are archeological remains of leprosy found in the bones of ancient Egyptian mummies in 200 BC as leprosy tends to destroy the nasal and cheek bones (4). Leprosy is mentioned in the Bible but, as it is not described in detail, it probably included other scaly ulcerated skin conditions diseases (2,4). Hansen, a Norwegian physician first isolated M.leprae in 1873. This bacillus is a slender rod about 3 microns long. It has a thick capsule that makes it difficult for antibiotics to penetrate.

Leprosy probably spreads from person to person via nasal droplets. Touching a person or short term contact does not seem to be a risk factor. However, if a person has had long term contact with an infected person he could get the disease 50% of the time. Doctors and nurses who have worked with patients with leprosy for many years seldom come down with the disease (5). An immune compromised person is more liable to come down with the disease (5). Symptoms usually do not begin until >1 year after the infection (average 5-7 years) (5,6).

The features of leprosy include patchy areas of depigmentation of the face or the limbs that are often devoid of sensation. Later, the skin thickens in the face, giving a lion-like appearance and nodular deposits appear on the ear. There is injury to the peripheral nerves with loss of sensation in the extremities, so that patients may become unaware of any injuries to their arms and legs. Thus, loss of limbs or digits may ensue (3,5,6).

Isolation of patients to leper colonies, e.g. in Hawaii, Carville (Louisiana), Westfort (S. Africa) (9) was a common way of handling them because they were erroneously believed to be highly infectious. Some areas in India, China, Africa and Thailand still have leper colonies (8). In the 1980s there were 5.2 million patients in the world with leprosy, which has been reduced to 200,00 globally by 2020, because of the effectiveness of treatment (8).

India and Brazil are the main places where leprosy is still common. Precise numbers are hard to obtain because of the social stigma attached to the disease. In 2015 there were only 200 cases reported in the U.S. (8).

Treatment consists of triple therapy (Dapsone, Rifampin, Clofazimine) for either 6 months or 1 year depending on the severity of the disease (7). More recently Bedaquiline has been used with promising results (1). The earlier the treatment is started the better, as it can then prevent the development of irreversible nerve damage. Once triple therapy has been started the patient is no longer infectious and in many instances can live with their families and have a productive existence (8).

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A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT 'THE LION'S MANE'

1. Summary (Diogenes Club)

Holmes is living in retirement in Sussex. He and Stackuurst are walking along the high chalk cliff which borders the ocean when McPherson comes staggering toward them. He is dying and his last words are, "The lion's mane." His torso is covered with welts, "as from a fine wire scourge."

Holmes discovers that McPherson is engaged to Maude. They have kept their engagement a secret because Maude gets no encouragement from either Tom or William and because Fitzroy's uncle would disinherit him if he were to become engaged without his consent. Holmes is very impressed with Maude – almost as with Irene Adler.

Fitzroy's dog, which has been haunting the seashore at the site of his mater's death, dies in a manner very similar to McPherson.

Murdoch has been searching the shore of the crime scene and decides to explore aquatically. He staggers into Holmes' house in a state of collapse. Simultaneously, Holmes has independently solved the case!

The killer is a huge jellyfish.

Murdoch quickly recovers from his injuries.

Holmes finds the culprit caught in a tidal pool and smashes it with a boulder..

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2. Story Info Sheet (McMurdo's Camp)

- First published in:
  Liberty, November 27, 1926; The Strand Magazine, December 1926.

- Time frame of story (known/surmised):
  Towards the end of July, 1907, stated.

- Holmes & Watson living arrangements:
  Watson not present. At this period of Holmes' life the good Watson had passed almost beyond his ken. An occasional week-end visit was the most that Holmes ever saw of him. Holmes was retired and living in his little Sussex home, and it was he that wrote the story.

- Opening scene:
  Holmes and his neighbor Harold Stackhurst, the master of the well-known coaching establishment, The Gables, encountered each other strolling out before breakfast to enjoy the exquisite air the morning after a gale cleared. They walked along the cliff path which led to the steep descent to the Admirable Beach.

- Client:
  None. Holmes stumbled into this mystery involving his neighbors and friends while in his retirement.

- Crime or concern:
  While walking, Holmes and Stackhurst encountered the academy's science tutor, Fitzroy McPherson, who had staggered up the steep hill from the beach and collapsed in obvious agony almost at their feet. The appearance was he had been mortally injured by an unknown assailant, and his back was marked with weals resembling those left by a scourge or cat-o'-nine-tails. He uttered the words "the Lion's Mane." The words were slurred and indistinct, and had burst in a shriek from his lips. He threw his arms into the air, then fell forward on his side, dead. He had bitten through his lower lip in the paroxysm of his agony.

  Holmes investigated the scene but found no evidence of a second person's presence on the beach where McPherson had been swimming in a tidal pool.

  A few days later, McPherson's dog was found dead by the same tidal pool, its little body contorted in agony. Then later came a sudden, similar assault on the academy's mathematics tutor, Ian Murdoch, who was a prime suspect in McPherson's death since they had been rivals for the hand of the beautiful Maude Bellamy.

- Villain:
  A jellyfish, Cyanea capillata. It was trapped in deep end of a tidal pool, so any bather there would encounter it.

- Motive:
  None. That's just what happens with jellyfish.

- Logic used to solve:
  Holmes was an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles. The phrase 'the Lion's Mane' haunted his mind. He knew that he had seen it somewhere in an unexpected context. Turned out it was in the little chocolate and silver volume, *Out of Doors*, by the famous observer, J. G. Wood. Wood himself very nearly perished from contact with the same vile creature, so he wrote with a very full knowledge. The creature radiated almost invisible filaments to the distance of fifty feet, and that anyone within that circumference from the deadly centre was in danger of death.

- Policemen:
  Anderson, the village constable of Fulworth, a big, ginger-moustached man of the slow, solid Sussex breed.
  Inspector Bardle of the Sussex Constabulary — a steady and solid bovine, burly, and phlegmatic man with thoughtful ox-like eyes.

- Holmes' fees:
  None.

- Transport:
  None. A purely local case.

- Food:
  No mention.

- Drink:
  Half a tumbler of brandy (the universal palliative) was given to Ian Murcoch after he was attacked. The raw spirit brought about a wondrous change. Then more and more brandy was poured down his throat, each fresh dose bringing him back to life.
  The author who wrote of a jellyfish attack, J.G. Wood, gulped down brandy, a whole bottleful, and it seemed to have saved his life after the attack.

- Vices:
  No mention.

- Other cases mentioned:
  None.

- Notable Quotables:
  "I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box-room with packets of all sorts stowed away therein — so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there." – Holmes
  "That the dog should die was after the beautiful, faithful nature of dogs." – Holmes

- Other interestings:
  This was Holmes' last recorded case before he became a spy for Britain against the Germans in the events leading up to WWI, as recorded in His Last Bow.

- When all was said and done:
  Holmes and Stackhurst killed the jellyfish by smashing it with a boulder. A flapping edge of yellow membrane showed that the creature was beneath it. A thick oily scum oozed out from below the stone and stained the water round, rising slowly to the surface.
  Well, you've done it! I had read of you, but I never believed it. It's wonderful!" Inspector Bardle to Holmes, following the explanation of the case.

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

- Publishing History
  # 57 of the 60 stories
  First published in The Strand Magazine, December, 1926 In the US Liberty Magazine, November 27, 1926
  Part of The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes collection by
  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 Tuesday, July 27 to Thursday, Aug 3, 1909 making it 59th of the 60. This means that Holmes 55 and Watson is 57 but not hears from.

- Christopher Morley Says
  "A young science teacher went swimming and died in agony on the beach, apparently flogged to death. Holmes himself tells the story, and much better this time. The peaceful seclusion of his bee-farm in Sussex, where he lived alone with his housekeeper (presumably Mrs. Hudson), had improved his writing. His villa was probably at Birling Gap, west of the great promontory of Beachy Head, and near the famous chalk cliff known as the Seven Sisters. In the garret of his house Holmes kept all the books he had gathered in a lifetime, and one of these (a volume of natural history) showed him what had happened."

- Dummies Short Summary
  "In this, the second story told by Holmes, he has retired to a cottage on the Sussex Downs near the coast. One morning a neighbor staggers up the beach and dies, crying out, "The lion's mane!" Holmes finds the man's back is covered with what looks like whip marks. What killed the man, and what do his dying words mean?"

- How Many Words
  At 7,234 words LION has the 18h most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

- Classifying This Case
  This case is one of 23 classified as a MURDER and one of 14 where the perpetrator was either killed, arrested, or otherwise satisfactorily handled. And the victim was killed by a giant sea medusa.

- The Best Of Sherlock Holmes
  LION is near the bottom of the pile on most lists.
  - 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not on his list of 12 favorites.
  - 1959 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 53rd on their list of favorites.
  - 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 33rd on their list of favorites.
  - 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 33rd of the 56 short stories.

- What Else Happened That Year (1909)
  - January 16 – Ernest Shackleton's expedition claims to have found the magnetic South Pole[1] (but the location recorded may be incorrect).
  - January 24 – The White Star Liner RMS Republic sinks the day after a collision with SS Florida. In the first recorded use of the CQD emergency radio signal for a large passenger vessel, one person, a male passenger, is lost on the Republic.[2]
  - March 18 – Einar Dessau uses a shortwave radio transmitter, becoming the first radio broadcaster.
  - March 31 – Serbia accepts Austrian control over Bosnia and Herzegovina.
  - April 6 – Robert Peary, Matthew Henson, and four Inuit explorers, Ootah, Ooqueah, Seegloo, and Egigingwah, come within a few miles of the North Pole.[3]
  - April 11 – The city of Tel Aviv (known in its first year as Ahuzat Bayit) is founded by the Jewish community on the outskirts of Jaffa.
  - April 14 – Adana massacre: Ottoman Turks kill 15,000–30,000 Armenian Christians in the Adana Vilayet.
  - April 18 – Joan of Arc is beatified in Rome.

- April 27 – Sultan of the Ottoman Empire Abdul Hamid II is overthrown and succeeded by his brother, Mehmed V. He IS sent to the Ottoman port city of Thessaloniki (Selanik) the next day.
- June 15 – Representatives from England, Australia and South Africa meet at Lord's Cricket Ground and form the Imperial Cricket Conference.
- July 25 – Louis Blériot is the first man to fly across the English Channel (thus a large open body of water) in a heavier than-air craft.
- August 12 – Indianapolis Motor Speedway opens in the United States.
- November 18 – In Nicaragua 500 revolutionaries (including 2 Americans) are executed by order of dictator José Santos Zelaya. The United States responds by sending 2 warships.
- December 23 – King Albert I of Belgium succeeds his uncle, Leopold II (died December 17), on the throne.

- Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

  Watson is not present for this story. Good ole' Watson only has an occasional week-end visit. This was the most that Holmes ever saw each other. Holmes was retired and living in his little Sussex home, and it was he that wrote the story.

- Dramatis Personae
  - Harold Stackhurst, Holmes' neighbor and master of a private school.
  - FITZROY Mcpherson, science master at the school. Secretly engaged to Maude.
  - Ian Murdoch, math teacher at the school. Former suitor of Maude.
  - Anderson, the village constable.
  - Maude Bellamy, the local beauty and daughter of …
  - Tom Bellamy, owner of a boat livery
  - William Bellamy, son of Tom who is co-owner of the livery.
  - Fitzroy's Uncle, a rich dying man. Fitzroy is his sole heir.
  - The Lion's Mane, Cyanea capillata, a stinging jellyfish.

- Quotable Sherlock

  Very little said that is worth remembering.
  - "That the dog should die was after the beautiful, faithful nature of dogs."
  - "I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles."

- Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

  LION has never been on any sized screen.

- Fainting In The Canon

  In this tale, Godfrey Emsworth and Mrs. Emsworth both actually faint.

- Annotated Sherlock
  - "surds" irrational numbers with an indefinite number of digits after the decimal point, such as the square root of three
  - "clay or soft marl" clay mixed with carbonate of lime
  - "amid the hard shingle" a beach or other tract covered with loose stones or pebbles

- Weapons
  - Boulder - Dislodged by Holmes on top of Cyanea Capillata.
  - Flexible Whip or Scourge - Though by Inspector Bardle to have been the murder weapon used to kill Fitzroy

4. Case Inquiries (Alexander E. Braun)

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"The Adventure of the Lion's Mane" first appeared in Liberty Magazine on November 27, 1926 and it was published in The Strand Magazine on December of that same year. It is part of The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes.

- Main Characters:
  Harold Stackhurst, a good friend of the retired Holmes and headmaster of the Gables coaching establishment.
  Fitzroy McPherson, science master at the college.
  Ian Murdoch, mathematics master at the same institution.
  Maud Bellamy, "the beauty of the neighborhood."
  Tom and William Bellamy, Maud's father and brother respectively.
  Inspector Bardle, Sussex policeman.

- Notable Quotes:

"At this period of my life the good Watson had passed almost beyond my ken. An occasional week-end visit was the most that I ever saw of him. Thus I must act as my own chronicler. Ah! had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty!"

He and I were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that we could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation.

"I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles."

- Of Dubious Canonicity?

This is one of two stories (BLAN being the other) which noted Holmesian scholar D. Martin Dakin—as well as other Canon scholars and students—very much doubt was actually written by Holmes. In his scholarly canonical opus, A Sherlock Holmes Commentary, he strongly protests that the two stories supposedly authored by Holmes himself are rather awkwardly written and that their muddled prose is unworthy of our sleuth, who has always been "lucid, powerful and clear in every detail."

"I conclude that these two are pseudonymous stories," he wrote, acerbically adding that, "In addition, Holmes's comparison of his mind to an attic stored with an unsystematic mass of out-of-the-way information is in direct contradiction to what he told Watson of his mental habits in A Study in Scarlet— that he dismissed from his mind all knowledge not of service to his work."

Holmes' lament over Watson's absence in this story has always had a leaden ring for me. His comment that the Good Doctor now only visits him on "an occasional week-end" does not ring true, especially considering what they went through during the course of their association before our sleuth finally retired.

In view of their years-long deep friendship, it is not surprising that years after, he and Watson would readily again team together in defense of the Realm, to neutralize von Bork. Certainly not what one would have expected of two people who have drifted apart.

Also peculiar is Holmes' complaint regarding Watson's "occasional week-end" visits. He makes it seem as if he expected these occasional reunions to travel upon a one-way road. Are we to think that he did not visit the Good Doctor in turn? The South Downs is 58 miles from London, and trains back then averaged between 40 to 50 mph. This would have meant a trip of roughly an hour—hardly an exhausting journey of excessive duration. While this is a relatively short and not uncomfortable trip by train, it is not something one would undertake regularly; especially if Watson, unlike Holmes, was still in harness, attending to patients.

The logical expectation would have been that upon retirement he would have shut himself off from all human contact and monastically devote himself to profound chemical studies, writings about crime, and the life of bees. Obviously this does not seem to have been the case. Personal experience has shown me that although retirement does not fully remove you from the Hamster Wheel of Life, being freed from the need to daily arise to don armor and gallop off to face the hideous, many-headed Making a Living dragon one does find oneself with more time to pursue different interests. This gift does indeed have a life-changing effect.

Regardless of all this, however, we are witnessing here a disturbingly changed Holmes. His statement that he holds "a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge, without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box-room with packets of all sorts stowed away within—so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there" borders on the unbelievable! What became of the Sherlock Holmes who was so chary in limiting his knowledge intake of knowledge exclusively to those matters he could use in his work? Solely information he could immediately lay a hand on.

The Master Sleuth was never a social butterfly. All uninvited visits to his residence were unwelcomed, unless they were made by desperate clients. On more than one occasion Watson made mention of his friend's aversion to useless exertion; yet we now learn that he goes out swimming with friends and acquaintances.

Also, that he has acquired new, more sociable habits, which make him accepting of evening visitations without invitation.

Instead, we are to believe (supposedly from him directly) that Stackhurst and he "were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that we [italics added] could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation"!

All this makes the retired Holmes appear to echo Marley's ghost's regret when he urges Ebenezer Scrooge to reform and go out into the world and participate in the lives of his fellow creatures: "Business? Business? Mankind was my business—their welfare was my business!" Ineffable twaddle, say I!

The Lethal Paroxysm

McPherson's agonizing death is described in all its facets. Having had an unfortunate experience with a cousin of the murderous Cyanea capillata as a boy, I do not doubt that the pain and agony started immediately after contact with the animal's tentacles—it feels as if you are being burned with strong acid.

That being said, why was it immediately assumed that he was murdered? From McPherson's final seemingly cryptic utterance, "the Lion's Mane" and the peculiar marks on his body there seems to have been no apparent reason to conclude that he had been the victim of foul play. It should have been immediately clear that the marks that were observed could not have been produced by a flogging.

Although it is quite possible to whip someone to death, using a thin wire for this does not sound too plausible, unless it were part of an arrangement such as the one would find in something like a cat o'nine tails—several knotted cords (wires in this case) attached to some sort of a handle. This does not seem to have been the case because there is mention of his having "been terribly flogged by a thin wire scourge."

According to his acquaintances, McPherson "was a natural athlete . . . and excelled in every game which did not throw too great a strain upon him." Even Maud believed a single person could not have done this to him:

"Bring them to justice, Mr. Holmes. You have my sympathy and my help, whoever they may be." It seemed to me that she glanced defiantly at her father and brother as she spoke.

"Thank you," said I. "I value a woman's instinct in such matters. You use the word 'they.' You think that more than one was concerned?"

"I knew Mr. McPherson well enough to be aware that he was a brave and a strong man. No single person could ever have inflicted such an outrage upon him."

It also stands to reason that regardless of a compromised heart someone being whipped almost to death would surely have put up some sort of determined struggle. That not being the case, then he would have had to be tied down spread-eagle, like a sailor condemned to be flogged in the old British Royal Navy. However, there were no ligature signs on the body.

The history of Nelson's navy being one of my pursuits, I find it difficult to accept that the marks on McPherson's body which were caused by what essentially was a chemical burn, could have been mistaken for the welts raised by any whip, much less specifically "a very stiff cat-o'-nine-tails with small hard knots upon it."

Until well into the 19th century, flogging was a common punishment for various offenses. Sailors could be flogged for drunkenness, insolence, neglect of duty, or minor theft. The severity of the punishment varied, with minor infractions typically resulting in a dozen lashes, while more serious offenses could lead to up to 36 strokes; the results of such punishment were severe wounds and later unmistakable scars.

Flogging was a punishment very much still in living memory back then. The effect of just one stroke of a cato'-nine tails should have been sufficient to dismiss such a cause. Properly wielded, a knotted cat-o'-nine-tails could tear pieces of flesh at the first stroke.

It is therefore unlikely that what were in reality chemical burns could have been mistaken for whip welts. Although someone like Sherlock Holmes, who keenly researched the effect of beatings on cadavers, should have been acquainted with the cat-o'-nine-tails' signature, it was the local policeman got closer to the truth:

"It is, of course, an absurd idea," said the policeman, "but if a red-hot net of wire had been laid across the back, then these better marked points would represent where the meshes crossed each other."

"A most ingenious comparison. Or shall we say a very stiff cat-o'-nine-tails with small hard knots upon it?"

There are other aspects one wishes Holmes had either left out or had provided a little more detail. The Old Queen being hardly cold in her grave yet, one may safely assume that the era's proprieties were still in force. In other words, McPherson would not have been skinny-dipping. Therefore, if he was properly attired in a bathing suit why would he trouble in his agony to put on pants, shoes, and an overcoat before seeking help? After all, he was in agony, not insane.

According to Holmes' observations, as he was trying to climb back McPherson fell more than once; however, although it had been simply thrown around his shoulders in capelike fashion, he somehow managed to keep his overcoat on. It is difficult to believe that in his painful agony and urgent attempt to seek help, McPherson would not have paused to dry himself. Logically, would have meant that he or at least his coat and pants should have been wet, so how could Holmes conclude from the dry towel that he hadn't

been in the water? Surely he did not expect that poor bloke to stop to dry himself on the towel whilst going through the torments of the damned.

Another question that arises (albeit a minor one) is whether a dog, which is covered in fur, would be sufficiently vulnerable to the tentacle stings of a Lion's Mane for the encounter to cause its death?

What else happened in 1907:

Empire

New Zealand receives Dominion status.

King Edward VII visits Tsar Nicholas II; Anglo-Russian differences settled; the Dual Entente becomes the Triple Entente with Russia joining Britain and France.

Channel Tunnel Scheme rejected by Parliament.

Responsible government granted to Orange River Colony.

Imperial College of Science and Technology, part of London University, created by amalgamating the Royal College of Science, City and Guilds Technical College, and the Royal School of Mines.

Opening of Northern Line of London Underground Railway.

Brooklands Motor Racing Circuit opened.

Formation of Joint Committee of Oxford and Workers' Educational Association.

Britain

Women allowed to serve on Local Government Councils.

Territorial Army introduced into Britain by War Minister Haldane.

Railway Conciliation Boards established.

Taxicabs are first legally recognized.

United Methodist Church established.

Guaranteeing Treaty between Britain, Russia, Germany, and France.

Companies Act: limited-liability principle applied to private companies.

World

Anarchy in Morocco; murder of French workmen at Casablanca.

General League of German Trade Unions formed.

Oklahoma admitted as state in the U.S.A.

Revolt of Heroes crushed by German troops.

Meeting of Second Russian Duma; Stolypin becomes chief minister; Duma is dissolved, Third Duma is elected.

Parliamentary rule suppressed in Portugal by Carlos I.

Pope Pius X orders Benedictine Order to revise the Vulgate. Italian bishops are urged to suppress Modernist teachings in schools and the press.

The Hague Peace Conference to limit armaments fails; ban on aerial bombing in war rejected.

Germany refuses armament limitations proposed by Hague Peace Conference.

Art

Rousseau paints The Snake Charmer.

Singe writes Playboy of the Western World, a drama that provokes riots in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

Science and Technology

Henri Farman makes a successful biplane.

RMS Mauretania launched; 30,700 tons, 26 knots.

Jannsky discovers the four principal blood groups (O, A, B, AB) in humans; it leads to successful blood transfusions.

G. Urbain separates rare metals ytterbium and lutetium.

Electric washing machine invented by Hurley Machine Co., of the U.S.A.

First airship flies over London.

First attempts at preservation of fruit by freezing.

August von Wassermann develops his test for syphilis, determining the seriousness of the infection.

William Willett proposes "daylight saving"; adopted in 1916.

Introduction of medical inspection of schoolchildren.

5. Selected Chronologies

a.	The Original Story by Arthur Conan Doyle	July, 1907
b.	William Baring-Gould	Tuesday, July 27, 1909
c.	H.W. Bell	Tuesday, July 21, 1907
d.	Roger Butters	July, 1907
e.	Jay Finley Christ	Tuesday, June 25, 1907
f.	Jean-Pierre Crauser	Tuesday, July 30, 1907
g.	D. Martin Dakin	July, 1907
h.	Bill Dorn	Friday, July 05, 1907
i.	Henry Folsom	Tuesday, July 27, 1909
j.	John Hall	July, 1907
k.	Craig Janasek	Thursday, July 25, 1907
l.	Brad Keefauver	Tuesday, July 30, 1907
m.	Toshio Suzuki	Tuesday, July 27, 1909
n.	June Thomson	July, 1907
o.	Ernest Bloomfield Zeisler	Tuesday, July 27, 1909

6. Canonical Queeries (Ralph Edwards, BSI)

- What adjectives are used in the Canon, like singular, abstruse, and unusual?
- Was it a little home or an estate villa?
- Did the yearning come from a country boyhood?
- Did Watson insinuate that London was gloomy?
- Did Watson share the yearning for a country life?
- Did Holmes ever visit Watson?
- In what ways would Watson have been a better chronicler?
- Would the pools be good for swimming at high tide?
- Is this location suitable for bee-keeping?
- Are coaching establishments peculiar to England?
- Would the students have been college educated?
- Did country living change Holmes' personality?
- Was Holmes, in his career, usually a late or early riser?
- Why "Mr. Holmes" and not "Holmes"?
- What could be more taxing than outdoor winter swimming?
- Is it significant that McPherson was a science master?
- What swimming stroke did the men use?
- Do physical attributes reflect temperament?
- Are surds and conic sections highly abstract?
- What was McPherson's "station"?
- Why did Holmes "discourage such conversations"?
- Was the dog's breed important?
- Would pads of cotton wool be a normal household item?
- When did Holmes have an opportunity to take photographs?

7. 17 Steps (Brad Keefauver, BSI)

1. Watch Me Pull A Lion's Mane Out Of My Hat!

"It is a most singular thing that a problem which was certainly as abstruse and unusual as any which I have faced in my long professional career should have come to me after my retirement," Holmes writes at the beginning of the case, then bemoaning Watson's absence with, "Ah! had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty!"

Once again we find Holmes reporting a case of something outside the criminal realm being viewed as a criminal occurrence, and once again giving it much hoopla at the start. Was the detective knowingly exaggerating his excitement, to make up for Watson's missing enthusiasm? Might he be mocking Watson a bit in that last part of his statement? Or had Holmes simply become so jaded with the criminal that only non-criminal cases that seemed at first to be crime-based were the only ones that surprised him?

2. Trouble In Partnership Paradise?

Holmes writes, "I had given myself up entirely to that soothing life of Nature for which I had so often yearned during the long years spent amid the gloom of London. At this period of my life the good Watson had passed almost beyond my ken."

Does the "gloom of London" refer to the infamous atmosphere of the city itself, or a state of mind that pervaded Holmes's time there? Followed so quickly by a mention of Watson's "passing" from his life, is there a slight implication that the partnership was partly responsible for that gloom toward the end?

3. The Good Doctor's Excuse For Not Visiting

Holmes then says of Watson, "An occasional week-end visit was the most that I ever saw of him." Given the fact that Watson always seems to be the one who controlled how much or how little he saw of Holmes, what was keeping Watson away from Holmes at this point? A wife who was less sympathetic toward Holmes than Mary Morstan? Did children enter the picture? Or was Watson just a Londoner who didn't care to spend that much time in the country?

4. A Man's Home Is His Fortress

"My villa is situated upon the southern slope of the downs, commanding a great view of the Channel. At this point the coast-line is entirely of chalk cliffs, which can only be descended by a single, long, tortuous path, which is steep and slippery."

Would Holmes have selected such a location for its defensive qualities as much as its scenic view, with so many criminals who would love to have their revenge upon him? How relatively expensive would such seaside real estate have been?

5. Holmes's Friend In Sussex

"Stackhurst himself was a well-known rowing Blue in his day, and an excellent all-round scholar. He and I were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that we could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation."

What sorts of things might have caused the two men to hit it off so well from day one? What caused Holmes to change from the man who didn't encourage visitors or care for socializing to the sort of fellow who didn't mind a neighbor dropping in unannounced?

6. Something Not On Watson's Famous List

"Summer and winter he went for his swim, and, as I am a swimmer myself, I have often joined him."

Holmes calls himself a swimmer, but one would think his years in London gave him little opportunity to exercise that skill for decades. Was there any place a urbanite in the heart of London could go for a pleasant swim in the 1880s and 1890s without leaving town? Or was this just a childhood recreation that Holmes reacquainted himself with after retirement?

7. Another Suspicious Mathematics Coach

Murdoch "seemed to live in some high, abstract region of surds and conic sections, with little to connect him with ordinary life."

What might Murdoch have been doing in that high, abstract region? What sort of adventures and explorations might one have among the surds and conic sections of higher mathematical planes?

8. The Mathematics Of Dog Versus Window

"On one occasion, being plagued by a little dog belonging to McPherson, he had caught the creature up and hurled it through the plate-glass window."

"Plate glass," as used in large picture windows, tends do be a thicker glass, does it not? Birds often thump into such windows, thinking it open air, without breaking them. How big would a dog have to be to go all the way through a plate glass window? Could a chihuahua be thrown by the average scholar at a force that would break through plate glass?

9. The Law In Fulworth . . . At Least Until The Boss Shows Up

Anderson, the village constable, admits "This is a big thing for me to handle, and I'll hear of it from Lewes if I go wrong." Holmes then tells him to send for his superior, whom one would assume was from the aforementioned Lewes. What sort of hierarchy did the village constable serve under at that time? Did he take orders from a central headquarters in the next larger town, such as a county seat? How much authority did he have on his own?

10. The Most Important Meal Of The Day

When Holmes asks why none of the students were swimming with MacPherson, Stackhurst says, ""Ian Murdoch held them back," said he. "He would insist upon some algebraic demonstration before breakfast."

Before breakfast? Was this a school or a boot camp? What was the structure of a coaching establishment that a teacher could just show up at any given moment and demand a performance?

11. Holmes Lives Next To A Tourist Trap?

We are told Fulworth is an "old-fashioned hamlet" with "several modern houses" on the outskirts, all curving around a bay. Yet we also learn Tom Bellamy "owns all the boats and bathing-cots at Fulworth," which sounds like the little village does a business in swimming and boating tourists. How lonely is Holmes's place if it's only a pleasant (and thyme-scented) walk from a tourist beach?

12. And Then There's Maud . . .

"There was no gainsaying that she would have graced any assembly in the world. Who could have imagined that so rare a flower would grow from such a root and in such an atmosphere? Women have seldom been an attraction to me, for my brain has always governed my heart, but I could not look upon her perfect clear-cut face, with all the soft freshness of the downlands in her delicate colouring, without realizing that no young man would cross her path unscathed. Such was the girl who had pushed open the door…"

We've heard Watson describe a lot of women in his time. He's great at describing their fashions, figures, carriage, and every little detail he can delicately divulge. But when it's Holmes's turn, how does the great detective do it? He describes the pretty lady in terms of his reaction to her, and by extension, other men's reactions to her. Why this difference between doctor and detective?

13. A Week In July Without A Swim?

A week passes after MacPherson's death, and yet no one goes to the bathing pool with the dangerous visitor in it? Usually, it seems both the students and Holmes swam in the pool. As they all thought MacPherson had been whipped by an unknown person with a grudge against him, why wouldn't anyone have encountered MacPherson's killer while swimming in the interim?

14. The Law In Sussex, Part Two

Inspector Bardle of the Sussex Constabulary shows up a week after the murder is done, convinced he must arrest somebody just to arrest somebody, it seems. Would Bardle have been occupied in some other part of Sussex, and just getting down to Fulworth at last? Would he have come from Lewes, the seat of the village constable's higher-up, or elsewhere?

15. Holmes's Drug-Free Dwelling

"For God's sake, oil, opium, morphia!" Ian Murdoch cries out in agony after the attack of the tale's villain. Holmes meets this request with cotton soaked in salad oil, along with Watson's standard cure-all, brandy.

Would we expect Holmes to stock anything more potent at this point in his life, or has he gone so drug-free he doesn't even have any leftovers currently in his home?

16. Murdoch's Recovery From The Poison

The venom of Cyanea Capillata is enough to kill a weaker man, and, indeed, causes Ian Murdoch to pass out from the pain. Yet he up and walking out arm-in-arm with Harold Stackhurst in a period of time that seems nearly under an hour. Was this to be expected? How long should a victim of Cyanea be down for?

17. Not The Handiest Place For A Reference Book

"There is a great garret in my little house which is stuffed with books," Holmes writes, going on to say that is where he retrieves his copy of J. G. Wood's Out of Doors from. As Holmes retired to enjoy the "soothing life of Nature," why wouldn't he keep his nature books in a little handier place?

8. View Halloas (Rosemary Michaud)

"Everyone delights to spend a summer holiday,
Down beside the side of the silvery sea.
I'm no exception to the rule, in fact if I'd my way,
I'd reside by the side of the silvery sea."

So sang Basil Rathbone in his disguise as a music hall performer during "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes." And the real Sherlock Holmes obviously endorsed the sentiment, since he retired to the seaside. But when one of his neighbors fell dead at his feet, Holmes leaped into action (to the extent that his rheumatism would allow) and not only solved the case, but wrote it up himself for our enjoyment and edification. In a moment, the comments and questions to get us in the swim with "The Lion's Mane."

"My own chronicler:" Holmes speaks of "that soothing life of Nature for which I had so often yearned during the long years spent amid the gloom of London." And yet Watson's writings had led us to believe that Holmes preferred the excitement of the city. Was Watson wrong, or did Holmes simply change his opinion at some point?

Why did Holmes choose to write up this story? Does Holmes's writing style suggest that he was trying to imitate Watson? For a good portion of the story, Holmes seemed to forget all about the clue of the dying man's words, "the lion's mane." Do you think that Holmes genuinely forgot this clue, or was this merely his authorial attempt to misdirect the readers in order to present the real solution as a more impressive surprise?

If it was a mere trick upon the readers, was this fair play? When you first read the story, were you disappointed that the "murderer" was only a coelenterate?

If Watson had been there to write the story instead, how might he have changed it to make it more interesting to the reader?

Holmes was obviously much attracted to Maud Bellamy. Do you think he ever followed up on his feelings, or did he leave the field clear for Ian Murdoch?

A Shore Thing: Leaving aside Holmes's merits as a writer, what do you think of his detective skills in this story? Was he too quick to suspect Murdoch?

When Fitzroy McPherson was stung by the jellyfish, he did not stop to dry himself with his towel, but instead just pulled on a few articles of clothing and staggered up from the beach. Why didn't Holmes and Stackhurst notice that McPherson had been swimming? Shouldn't his trousers or his shoes, or at least his hair, have shown signs of dampness? How did Holmes miss this vital clue?

How did Holmes get those photographs of McPherson's injuries?

The probable answer to the mystery occurred to Holmes in a flash of inspiration. He only needed to consult his library to verify his theory. This is perfectly understandable, but why did he not arrange for someone to keep guard at the beach to prevent keep anyone else from swimming in the pool? And why did he allow the visit from Inspector Bardle to keep him from going straight down to the beach in the morning? Why did he choose to withhold his suspicions from the Inspector?

Is it strange that a man who once boasted of his ignorance of the solar system should have read about and remembered an obscure species of jellyfish? Where do you think Holmes drew the line between useless information and practical information??

9. Delicate Questions (Chris Redmond, BSI)

It has been said that Sherlock Holmes never lived and so can never die.

Is it really possible for him to retire, as he appears to do in this tale, or must he forever be brought out of retirement to combat jellyfish, Prussians, Nazis and invaders from other planets?

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10. Additional Thoughts (Steve Clarkson)

Setting forth from his retirement villa on a crystal-clear morning in July 1907, Sherlock Holmes was strolling along the cliffs overlooking the beaches along the Channel coast in company with his friend Harold Stackhurst, the operator of a local tutoring academy. Suddenly, they were confronted by the spectacle of the academy's science tutor, Fitzroy McPherson, staggering up the steep hill from the beach and collapsing in obvious agony almost at their feet. He had been mortally injured by an unknown assailant, and his back was marked with weals resembling those left by a scourge or cat-o'-nine-tails. Holmes investigated the scene but found no evidence of a second person's presence on the beach where McPherson had been swimming in a tidal pool.

A few days later, McPherson's dog was found dead by the same tidal pool, its little body contorted in agony. Then came a sudden, similar assault on the academy's mathematics tutor, Ian Murdoch, who was a prime suspect in McPherson's death since they had been rivals for the hand of a beautiful local woman.

The Adventure of the Lion's Mane is further proof to me that Holmes without Watson is like wine made without grapes. It just ain't the same. The difference appears to lie in the relative absence of "color," of the small nuances in Watson's writings that are diminished or absent when Holmes takes up the pen. I note with inward amusement that Holmes resorts to some of Watson's techniques in an effort to bring life to his narrative, such as withholding the identity and nature of the miscreant from his readers for several pages.

Without faulting Holmes' ability to recall minutiae stored in his "brain-attic." it would seem to me that his promise of straightforward, step-by-step analysis of a problem is abrogated when he reveals that his memory had finally led him to the solution. He doesn't write, "Then it came to me. I thought, 'Aha! It's cyanea capillata!'" Rather, he keeps the local gendarmerie and his readers in suspense before dramatically disclosing the identity of the miscreant while exclaiming, "Behold the Lion's Mane!" And what was his purpose in telling Inspector Bardle that he wouldn't be ready to make that revelation until midday? Obviously, that was an unnecessary delay in removing a threat which might have affected other bathers.

Ian Murdoch is an interesting character. He's tall, lean, introverted, and a mathematician of repute. What other character in the Canon does he resemble? (Hint: the other character's surname also begins with "M.") He also is guilty of an act that Doyle accords only to his worst villians: the abuse of a dog. (See: Stapleton in HOUN; Rucastle in COPP; and Brackenstall in ABBE.) But unlike those meanies, Murdoch marches off arm-in-arm with Stackhurst at the end of the story, a vindicated and falsely-suspected "good guy." What was Doyle's point in painting Murdoch as a malefactor when he intended to exculpate him at the end?

Ostensibly, Murdoch avoided sharing McPherson's fate only because he insisted on holding students back from the joys of bathing in order to give them an algebraic workout before breakfast(!). I can see it now: the young lads chafing and fretting in a classroom, looking out the window at the glorious morn while silently cursing the saturnine tutor who was preventing them from a refreshing dip in the tidal pools. Yet, when Murdoch appears on the scene and tut-tuts over McPherson's demise, he is alone. There is no mention of those students. Where were they? Did he assign them before-breakfast homework to keep them busy while he headed for the beach?

The male Bellamy's are also worthy of closer examination. Consider that the elder Bellamy began as a simple fisherman but rose to become a prosperous landowner and entrepreneur. One does not come from such humble roots to achieve worldly success without intelligence, ambition, determination, and a certain amount of ruthlessness. There is more to Bellamy pére than first meets the eye.

Obviously, neither he nor his loutish son had any use for McPherson, and they were outspoken in their opposition to any match between Maudie and Fitzroy McPherson. They were both familiar with the sea and its creatures.

What would have prevented them from seeking out a large specimen of cyanea capillata, towing it in a fishing net to some sequestered place, and thence to the tidal pool during high tide, in the predawn hours before McPherson would arrive for his morning swim? Could they have been the occupants of one of the small boats Holmes spied during his initial investigation of the crime scene?

11. Questions & Comments (Sonia Fetherston, BSI)

Just when Sherlock Holmes thought he'd earned a little retirement and relaxation, along comes our next case, The Adventure of the Lion's Mane. My weekly questions and comments:

Holmes says surds and conic sections are high, abstract concepts. I remember them as bonehead high school math. Who's right?

Why do Maud's father and brother, her immediate family and closest living relatives, refer to themselves merely as her "guardians?"

What exactly is Maud's "station?" How is Fitzroy's station different from Maud's?

"He gulped down brandy, a whole bottleful, and it seems to have saved his life." How does brandy act on the human body to achieve a cure like this?

Maud Bellamy's house is "the one with the corner tower" in the made-up vilage of Fulworth, Sussex. Holmes probably invented the name, as Watson often did, for the sake of confidentiality. Though most observers locate Fulworth in East Sussex, it's worth noting that there was a house on the West Sussex shore which could have inspired some small part of "The Lion's Mane."

It stood in the resort town of Felpham, past the post office on Limmer Lane. A contemporary description of this "Turret House" says it was a "plain white house in the village, with its turret in a corner of the walled garden." Once the home of gentleman-writer William Hayley (1745-1820), Turret House became better known as the haunt of Hayley's reluctant protege, Willliam Blake — that visionary genius (some say madman) who soared in the realms of mystical art and poetry. For several years, beginning in 1800, Hayley provided Blake with a thatched cottage a few steps away from his own door.

Blake wrote of the initial summons to Turret House:" Away to Sweet Felpham, for heaven is there; The Ladder of Angels descends thro' the air; On the Turret its spiral does softly descend…" Heaven soon turned to hell for Blake, who clashed with the imperious Hayley. Blake scribbled many delicious, sarcastic couplets about his patron in the margins of his surviving drawing books. The cottage Blake occupied survived, too; it's marked with a brass plaque. Turret House, alas, fell into the clutches of a developer several years ago and the site is now home to some modern flats.

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

This is a great little tale, dark and gothic, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

In this story we have crypts, dead bodies, the burning of bones in a furnace, rumours of ghosts, it's all great fun and a wonderful macabre story. There's even a bit of horse racing thrown in which made my husband sit up and pay attention (as I have mentioned before, he is an ex-racing journalist).

This story is such a good example of what a great story-teller Doyle was – not just clever and responsible for creating one of the best-loved characters in English fiction, but really good at spinning an imaginative yarn which is entertaining and a real page-turner.

This is the dilemma isn't it for so many writers? Do you create a work of great intellectual significance which might change the world? Do you use your writing as a vehicle show-off your intellectual prowess, or do you just try to create an entertaining page-turner that people can't put down? With my book, I went for the latter and aimed for something in-between low-brow and high-brow, an entertaining middle-ground with a mix of literary clout and fast-paced story-telling. I think Doyle made the same choice with Holmes, a choice which he perhaps came to regret when he struggled to get his more serious work recognised – though not when counting his money of course!

The story begins with Holmes bent over a microscope analysing threads from a coat and finding traces of glue amongst the fibres of fabric. He also tells Watson about brining a coiner to justice by finding the zinc and copper filings in the seam of his cuff. In this way Holmes was such a pioneer – using the science of deduction and forensic analysis rather than old-fashion methods of following a hunch to find the bad guys.

Watson reveals his love of betting on the horses when Holmes asks if he knows anything of the sport – "I ought to. I pay for it with about half my wound pension." Here again we see how Watson is rather carefree when it comes to money, just as with previous examples of him getting Holmes to keep his cheque book locked away and the general lack of business acumen shown towards his medical practice. This side of Watson gave me great creative opportunities in my own novel and I have used his human deficiencies to their full potential.

The story itself is all about Sir Robert Norberton from the estate of Shoscombe Old Place and his money troubles. The estate is actually owned by his sister who inherited it on the death of her husband. He is in debt and has bet all he has on his horse, Shoscombe Prince, to win the Derby. His sister dies of natural causes a week before the race and Sir Robert is so afraid that creditors will descend upon him and claim the horse, that he conceals the death in the hope of stalling things until after the race. He hides her body in a used coffin in the family crypt and burns the bones of the original occupant in a furnace.

Despite his questionable actions, all ends well when Shoscombe Prince wins the Derby and Sir Robert is able to settle his depts. For once, Doyle doesn't really come down on one side or the other with regard to how wrong the protagonist has been and leaves it up to the reader to decide whether the happy ending is deserved or not. For me, I think it ties things up neatly and rounds off an excellent story which shows Holmes and his methods in all their glory.

A well deserved 9 out of 10.

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13. Observance of Trifles (Brian Keith Snell)

If you recall from my last post (too long ago--*sorry*!), I was not a big fan of the **Sherlock Holmes**-penned tale, **The Adventure Of The Blanched Soldier**. While I applauded **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's** attempt to do something new, I thought the approach a failure. The tale was poorly told, essentially a series of *LONG* expositional narrations. Holmes was nowhere near a good a writer as **Watson**, and we sorely missed the doctor's descriptive detail. Holmes kept too much from the reader, so his solution seemed to be *plucked out of thin air*.

Well, **The Adventure Of The Lion's Mane** corrected much of that, and even though it, too, was "*written*" by Holmes, it is superior to Blanched Soldier in almost every way. Holmes' writing style is much more relaxed, and far more engaging. The characters are much more interesting. Holmes shares his thinking with the readers along the way, so we are viewing the mystery with him, and not watching a magician pull a rabbit out of a hat. There are a plethora of clues and suspects, making Lion's Mane really a pretty good read.

And then we find out the jellyfish did it. It is interesting that, for both of the stories Doyle chose to feature Sherlock as narrator, *no crime* had been committed, and there was *no villain*. That, I might suspect, is part of the reason Lion's Mane gets lumped in with Blanched Soldier and dismissed as a failed experiment.

It's not as if *every* Sherlock Holmes mystery requires a crime...many haven't. And you don't always need an actual villain--but someone needs to have some *agency* in the tale, there must be some *human reason* for the events we have followed.

In **Twisted Lip**, for example, there was no crime committed (putting aside any vagrancy or begging laws). And there was no villain--**Neville St. Claire** was just engaged in a fairly embarrassing occupation, and wished to hide it from his family. But there was still human activity to uncover, an examination of motives and behaviors, and someone trying to frustrate Holmes' investigations

But in Blanched Soldier, the "*mystery*" was that **Godfrey Emsworth** had contracted a socially ostracizing disease. Shocking, perhaps. But Godfrey had not done anything to *deserve* getting sick, and was not behind any kind of master plot aside from staying hidden. There was no human agency to uncover, except for a slight social lie. Heavens, who among us hasn't said "*Tell them I'm not home!*"? That's hardly a mystery requiring Sherlock Holmes!

Of course, such a story can work--Blanched Soldier is very similar to **Yellow Face**, if you think about it--but Soldier was not *well-written* enough to grip us with a situation, so the lack of crime and villain is more noticeable and *frustrating*.

Despite many suspects and motives, Lion's Mane pulls the rug out from the reader, too, by revealing the killer was an animal--just *a dumb act of nature*, as it were. And by way of comparison, we should note that the other times the Canon provided us with animal killers, they were either *trained beasts* used by vile villains, *or they were lashing out at villains* trying to harm them. In Lion's Mane, the jellyfish may have well as been a *bolt of lightning*, or a *falling boulder*. It wasn't part of any criminal or shameful actions--it was just a random, fatal accident. Holmes may as well have been an *insurance claims adjuster.*

That ending--it was just an accident--only serves to highlight some of the story's *strained coincidences*, which a better ending might have kept hidden from us. If it wasn't the day after a big storm; if some students hadn't just happened to be kept from swimming that morning; if **Fitzroy** didn't happen to have a weak heart...remove any link in the unlikely chain, and either **McPherson** doesn't die, or someone else gets stung but survives, or there are witnesses to tell us what happened. So, without such strained *manipulation* of events by Doyle, no mystery.

Sure, arcane coincidences are often involved in explaining how accidents happened--but this is mystery fiction, and we expect a *stronger* resolution to a mystery than a shrug and, "*well, nature is dangerous, I guess.*" It suddenly removers us from a *moral universe*, why people are responsible for theirs (an others') fates, and justice can come into play--even if Holmes did sometimes play a bit fast and loose with the concept. In detective fiction there usually is, whether we agree with it or not, a moral, a viewpoint. Lion's Mane robs us of that, a little bit, with a moral of "*well, sometimes shit just happens, even if innocent people are almost arrested for it. Societal rules mean nothing if a giant jellyfish gets blown into your cove*."

Which may not be a problem for you. But I suspect it is, because, as I said earlier, this is a pretty good story. But a lot of people dismiss it. In part it's because it appears in the little-respect **Case-Book.** In part, it's because it's a Holmes-narrated story, and we've been told they're no good.

But also, I think it's because it's the second tale in a row where the was no human mystery, and no villain to punish. Few have objected to "the snake did it" or "the horse did it," as resolutions to other mysteries. But with "*Cyanea capillata* did it," it's a revelation that bothers us, because it ultimately says, "*Sometimes people just die in stupid ways, and there's nothing you can do about it, and no one to catch punish*." How McPherson died was a mystery, but it wasn't a mystery story, despite all the trappings.

OTHER TRIFLES AND OBSERVATIONS:

**I do think this story was *much* better written than its predecessor, Blanched Soldier.

I like to think that Doyle soon saw that Soldier was too *cramped*, too non-engaging to work, so he loosened up "Holmes'"

writing-style considerably. Of course, there are perfectly good in-story reasons to explain this. In Soldier, we're not sure exactly when in his life Holmes has put pen to paper. In Lion's Mane, though, we're quite clear that he's been in *retirement* for some time. Perhaps this has freed his mind a bit, literarily. It's also possible that Watson, having read Soldier, passed on some tips to Holmes on how to make a story more interesting for the reader.

But whatever *meta* explanation you'd like to give, Mane is not only a clearly better read than Soldier, but there are definitely bits which do show us things from Holmes' perspective rather than Watson's, and that makes for some very *interesting* tidbits which I'll try to mention as we skip through the story.

**So the two mysteries that Holmes narrates, with no Watson present, just *happen* to be medical mysteries? What the heck, Sir Arthur?

While the good doctor may not have been an expert on tropical diseases, it's certainly possible that he had encountered leprosy-sufferers during his travels, and perhaps he might have had some *valuable input* into this case (although Holmes had it solved 12 seconds in...)

And in this case, Watson might not have had any knowledge of jellyfish attacks. But since a part of this mystery was "*how did Fitzroy die*," Watson's opinion could hardly have been less valuable than the anonymous idiot doctor who testified at the inquest.

**This is also the second of two stories were people were killed by poisonous animals and left confusing dying words...

They were slurred and indistinct, but to my ear the last of them, which burst in a shriek from his lips, were "the Lion's Mane." It was utterly irrelevant and unintelligible, and yet I could twist the sound into no other sense.

I guess I shouldn't criticize people who are dying in intense agony, especially McPherson, who clearly had no idea what it was that killed him. Still, if a victim could merely have blurted out "*It was a snake*!!' instead of "*Oh my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!*", that might have made solving the murder a tiny bit easier. Ditto with Fitzroy's "*the Lion's Mane*"...maybe something like "In the lagoon!"?

All I'm saying is, ***practice your dying words***, people. You can save detectives a whole lot of time rounding up your killers if you choose more carefully!

**Holmes: *"I had given myself up entirely to that soothing life of Nature for which I had so often yearned during the long years spent amid the gloom of London."*

A lot of people see that as, if not a contradiction of something Holmes said earlier, than at least a seemingly out of character attitude.

But we should remember--this is Sherlock *himself* writing. So any inconsistency comes from Watson's portrayal. It's possible that Holmes never expressed this desire to John, or that John never reported it to us.

And perhaps the years spent without Watson's partnership had taken a toll on the detective, and changed his attitude about London.

Regardless, this is certainly no reason to go about claiming the story "must" be *non-canonical* just because we learned something new about our hero from his own mouth.

**Holmes: *"My house is lonely. I, my old housekeeper, and my bees have the estate all to ourselves."*

It should be noted that, pre- or post-retirement, Holmes never took another flatmate besides Watson...

**Again, a new perspective on Holmes from the detective himself:

It was impossible to work upon so delightful a day, and I strolled out before breakfast to enjoy the exquisite air...Summer and winter he went for his swim, and, as I am a swimmer myself, I have often joined [McPherson].

Sherlock is more social and more outdoorsy than Watson portrayed him, it seems.

**A point where Watson's presence might have helped:

He was obviously dying. Those glazed sunken eyes and dreadful livid cheeks could mean nothing else...His back was covered with dark red lines as though he had been terribly flogged by a thin wire scourge.

The instrument with which this punishment had been inflicted was clearly flexible, for the long, angry weals curved round his shoulders and ribs. There was blood dripping down his chin, for he had bitten through his lower lip in the paroxysm of his agony. His drawn and distorted face told how terrible that agony had been.

Now, I'm no doctor, obviously, but I have had a jellyfish sting plenty of times as a youth. Nothing as big as this Cyanea capillata. But still, *ouch* enough. Yet even given "*dark lines as though he had been flogged*," the flesh likely wouldn't have been actually torn, as almost any type of actual flogging would accomplished.

Perhaps having had a medical companion on hand, someone who might have recognized the symptoms of a poisoning by venom, might have made short work of this mystery. At the very least, he could have put paid to the notion of some type of "scourging" that didn't even rip the flesh.

**Our first suspect:

Murdoch was the mathematical coach at the establishment, a tall, dark, thin man, so taciturn and aloof that none can be said to have been his friend. He seemed to live in some high abstract region of surds and conic sections, with little to connect him with ordinary life.

Interesting, isn't it, that Sherlock describes the dour teacher in terms that Watson often used to describe *him*?

Given that **Murdoch** was a math teacher and a murder suspect, I'm surprised that no one has floated a theory that he was really **Moriarty** in disguise, and had trained a jellyfish to commit a diabolical murder...

**Dog abuse:

On one occasion, being plagued by a little dog belonging to McPherson, he had caught the creature up and hurled it through the plate-glass window, an action for which Stackhurst would certainly have given him his dismissal had he not been a very valuable teacher.

You know, he could have been the most valuable teacher in the world, and *99.99%* of all institutions still would have sacked Murdoch instantly for that. Even if the dog were "*plaguing*" him, that hardly justifies tossing the pooch through a window. And it's pretty hard for me to see most pet owners getting over that enough to actually become friends with the canine tosser:

But for a year or more Murdoch has been as near to McPherson as he ever could be to anyone. He is not of a very sympathetic disposition by nature."

"So I understand. I seem to remember your telling me once about a quarrel over the ill-usage of a dog."

"That blew over all right."

"But left some vindictive feeling, perhaps."

"No, no, I am sure they were real friends."

"*Real friends*" after trying to kill my dog? Inconceivable!

**Wait just one minute! McPherson wades into the pool, and is stung all over by the hidden jellyfish. He is dying, in unendurable agony.

But he takes the time to put his on his coat, trousers and shoes before climbing the path?!?!

That may be taking the modesty of the era too far. If he hadn't taken to time to half-dress, he might have reached Holmes with time enough to actually explain, instead of blurting out a cryptic phrase...

**One of the bigger hiccups in the mystery is: why did Holmes assume Fitzroy *hadn't bathed*? Simply because he was (partly) dressed and his towel was dry? *"Had the body been found in the water I could hardly have missed it. It was the towel which misled me."*

As many have observed, given that he had never used his towel, McPherson would almost certainly have been at least still *damp*, and it's difficult to conceive of the great detective missing this, dry towel or no.

Still, we're told that Fitzroy "*had not been on the beach more than a quarter of an hour at the most.*" Allowing a little flexibility in that time, it's possible that he had mostly dried in the sun and morning air as he struggled up the cliff. And giving the hideousness of his death, and trace remaining water could have been dismissed as sweat produced in the "infernal agony."

**But even if you assume McPherson *hadn't* swam, Holmes still should have searched the "*lagoon*," right? If you're committed to the theory that some "*flexible scourge*" had been used to flail Fitzroy, isn't it possible that the killer might have hidden it in the water? Just because you think that Fitzroy hadn't gone in the water, doesn't mean the alleged killer hadn't.

**Holmes has become much better at describing characters: *"Anderson, the village constable, a big, ginger-moustached man of the slow, solid Sussex breed -- a breed which covers much good sense under a heavy, silent exterior."*

**When your teacher is a dick: *"Ian Murdoch held them back," said he. "He would insist upon some algebraic demonstration before breakfast."*

Algebra *before breakfast?* Human rights violation!!

Perhaps Sherlock wasn't as familiar with the community as he thought, as he is completely *unaware* of the existence of **Maud Bellamy, despite her apparent local fame: *"Everyone knows her. She is the beauty of the neighbourhood --a real beauty, Holmes, who would draw attention everywhere."*

Yet it seems that she was more observant, and recognized Holmes even though *he* had never seen her before: *"It seems that she already knew me by sight, for she turned to me at the end..."*

Tempers are really on edge at **The Gables:

"What were you doing there?" he asked.

Murdoch's face flushed with anger. "I am your subordinate, sir, under your roof. I am not aware that I owe you any account of my private actions."

Stackhurst's nerves were near the surface after all he had endured. Otherwise, perhaps, he would have waited. Now he lost his temper completely. "In the circumstances your answer is pure impertinence, Mr. Murdoch."

"Your own question might perhaps come under the same heading."

"This is not the first time that I have had to overlook your insubordinate ways. It will certainly be the last. You will kindly make fresh arrangements for your future as speedily as you can."

Well, that got out of hand quickly, didn't it?

Still, a colleague has just been (apparently) murdered, so perhaps it's not surprising that raw emotions quickly broke through into what should have been a civilized conversation...

**So much for Holmes' not forming theories before all the facts are in:

The one thing that impressed itself forcibly upon my mind was that Mr. Ian Murdoch was taking the first chance to open a path of escape from the scene of the crime. Suspicion, vague and nebulous, was now beginning to take outline in my mind. AND Again the shadow round this strange man seemed to me to be taking more definite shape. His record must be examined. His rooms must be privately searched.

Still, such theorizing is preferable to Holmes keeping the reader in the dark until the bitter end.

Still, searching a man's rooms on "*vague and nebulous*" suspicions? I guess that, as the rooms belonged to The Gables institution, and it wasn't the police doing the searching, no violation of Murdoch's rights occurred...

More Victorian/Edwardian morality on the role of young women in society from **Tom Bellamy:

My son here...is of one mind with me that Mr. McPherson's attentions to Maud were insulting. Yes, sir, the word 'marriage' was never mentioned, and yet there were letters and meetings, and a great deal more of which neither of us could approve.

Heavens--letters *AND* meetings?!?! How *scandalous*! Women must be protected from any attention from men unless marriage is discussed? I would have loved to see him try to raise a daughter in the era of email and Twitter and being with boys in school and... And later, Bellamy declares, *"I object to my girl picking up with men outside her own station."* So sexist and classist. King jerk, is all I'm saying.

**And it wasn't *just* Tom Bellamy who was a bit retrograde in his feelings towards unapproved couplings, as Maud tells us. *"We were engaged to be married, and we only kept it secret because Fitzroy's uncle, who is very old and said to be dying, might have disinherited him if he had married against his wish."*

This isn't the first time we have seen people hide relationships to avoid rich relatives finding out and disinheriting them. For me, it would have to be one *hell* of a potential bequest to get me to hide my love life like then. Then again, you do see people hide their relationships for all sorts of reasons, even today, including a fear of upsetting relatives.

One interesting question: *why* would the uncle have objected to this match? Bellamy clearly feels that Maud was above Fitzroy's station--so wouldn't he have been *marrying up*? Why would the uncle have resisted that?

Then again, we're told that Bellamy "*was a fisherman to start with*." Perhaps Uncle Bob objected because he felt that money didn't grant social status, and *nouveau riche* or not, he didn't want his heir to marry the child of a mere fisherman.

****, class and social strata are funny things...

**Holmes describing Maud:

Who could have imagined that so rare a flower would grow from such a root and in such an atmosphere? Women have seldom been an attraction to me, for my brain has always governed my heart, but I could not look upon her perfect clear-cut face, with all the soft freshness of the downlands in her delicate colouring, without realizing that no young man would cross her path unscathed....Maud Bellamy will always remain in my memory as a most complete and remarkable woman.

Again, many have thought this completely uncharacteristic of Sherlock. But this is the first time that we have Holmes *himself* describing a beautiful woman to us.

This is another case of Watson not filtering things through his perspective for us. Good on Doyle for not making everything a carbon copy of how Watson would have described Holmes' reaction.

**Holmes: *I turned over the paper. "This never came by post. How did you get it?"*

How did he know that? It's never explained, and I not sure how he knows. Had the paper never been folded, and was too big to have fit into any envelope? But the note was "crumpled" when she pulled it out...?

**Holmes:

You have known what it was to be in a nightmare in which you feel that there is some all-important thing for which you search and which you know is there, though it remains forever just beyond your reach.

As someone who is finding my memory deteriorating (seemingly by the day), I sympathize with this, and admire Holmes' self-honesty.

**How badly is Holmes losing his sharpness?

You will know, or Watson has written in vain, that I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box-room with packets of all sorts stowed away therein -- so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there.

I had known that there was something which might bear upon this matter. It was still vague, but at least I knew how I could make it clear.

This does seem to contradict Holmes' earlier descriptions of how he preserved his mental sharpness.

But then again, that was Holmes when he first met Watson, and now Holmes is much older, in retirement, and the discipline he alluded to in **Study In Scarlet** may be fading, either through relaxation--or deteriorating faculties.

And once again, this is Holmes himself telling us, and not something being filtered through his **Boswell**. Perhaps Watson misunderstood/misreported earlier...

The joys of policing a small town, as put forth by **Inspector Bardle: *"Yes, sir. There is really no one else when you come to think*

of it. That's the advantage of this solitude. We narrow it down to a very small compass. If he did not do it, then who did?"

Compare, of course, to Holmes' famous admonition about remote country living in **Copper Beeches**:

"Do you know, Watson," said he, "that it is one of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there."

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?"

"They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside."

"You horrify me!"

"But the reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard's blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. Had this lady who appeals to us for help gone to live in Winchester, I should never have had a fear for her. It is the five miles of country which makes the danger.

Not to mention, of course, the inspector completely overlooks the possibility of someone from outside the community coming to commit a crime...

**Unacceptable inquest:

"Have you examined the marks?" I asked. "I have seen them. So has the doctor." "But I have examined them very carefully with a lens. They have peculiarities."

Good gosh, I don't expect a 1907 **Surrey** doctor to necessarily have the capability to run a "*tox screen*" and discover jellyfish venom. But to *not* have "examined the marks very carefully with a lens"??? What did this quack do, just shrug his shoulders and say, "*Well, he's dead, I guess!"????*

**Alcohol was apparently *the most potent cure* against jellyfish toxin:

"Brandy! Brandy!" he gasped, and fell groaning upon the sofa..."Yes, yes, brandy!" he cried. "The man is at his last gasp. It was all I could do to bring him here. He fainted twice upon the way." Half a tumbler of the raw spirit brought about a wondrous change...More and more brandy was poured down his throat, each fresh dose bringing him back to life.

Also, the account from Holmes' book said a victim "*gulped down brandy, a whole bottleful, and it seems to have saved his life."*

Of course, it was common in the day to see liquor as a restorative, and especially brandy. And it's not the first time we've seen it used in these stories.

**The reveal:

"Cyanea!" I cried. "Cyanea! Behold the Lion's Mane!"

The strange object at which I pointed did indeed look like a tangled mass torn from the mane of a lion. It lay upon a rocky shelf some three feet under the water, a curious waving, vibrating, hairy creature with streaks of silver among its yellow tresses. It pulsated with a slow, heavy dilation and contraction.

The jellyfish did it...

**That was actually a *real* book, a *real* author, and an *actual* passage that Holmes read to us:

It is Out of Doors, by the famous observer, J. G. Wood. Wood himself very nearly perished from contact with this vile creature, so he wrote with a very full knowledge. Cyanea capillata is the miscreant's full name, and he can be as dangerous to life as, and far more painful than, the bite of the cobra.

Wood also wrote about jellyfish attacks in other books, so they obviously made a huge impression on him.

**Holmes: *"I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles."*

A retentive memory *that failed to remember for over a week...*

**Holmes: *"That phrase 'the Lion's Mane' haunted my mind. I knew that I had seen it somewhere in an unexpected context."*

So, then, it's remarkably convenient for solving this mystery that those were Fitzroy's last words...

****Stackhurst** and Murdoch make up:

Stackhurst held out his hand. "Our nerves have all been at concert-pitch," said he. "Forgive what is past, Murdoch. We shall understand each other better in the future."

Awww...