

The Red-Headed League



- First published in: The Strand Magazine, August 1891
- Time frame of story (known/surmised): October, 1890. Note: there are inconsistencies among dates stated by characters in this story that make it impossible to pin down an exact date, or even year.
- HOLMES & WATSON living arrangements: Watson not living with Holmes at 221B, instead residing at his house in Kensington.
- Opening scene: Watson calls upon Holmes and finds Holmes with a client, Jabez Wilson. Holmes invites Watson's involvement. Client interview in Baker St. takes up the first half of the story.
- Client: Jabez Wilson, a red-haired pawn broker.
- Crime or concern: Loss of well-paying job doing clerical make-work leads Wilson to contact Holmes. Real crime was attempt by Wilson's employee to break into a bank vault.
- Villains: Wilson's recently-hired and low-paid helper, Vincent Spaulding, and his confederate, Duncan Ross. Spaulding's true identity was John Clay, a brilliant criminal, who had attended Eaton and Oxford and whose grandfather was a Royal Duke. The red-headed Ross posed as director of the Red-Headed League, and was a murderer, thief, smasher, and forger.



- Motive: Burgle a bank vault. Trick pawn-broker into vacating his shop so tunnel can be dug from basement into neighbouring bank vault.
- Logic used to solve: Holmes saw through the ploy, and determined Wilson's pawn-shop backed up against bank on a main thoroughfare. Description of pierced ears and acid-scar on employee's forehead suggested Clay's involvement to Holmes. Dirty trouser-knees verified tunneling operation.
- Policemen: Peter Jones, the official police agent, who was brave as a bulldog and as tenacious as a lobster, but an absolute imbecile in his profession.

• Holmes' fees: Remarkably, Holmes prevented the loss of £30,000, but when the bank-director offered to pay Holmes, the reply was, "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League."

- Transport: HOLMES & WATSON travelled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; then took a short walk to Saxe-Coburg Square.
 - HOLMES & WATSON, the policeman, and the bank-director took two hansoms and rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets, finally emerging into Farrington Street near the scene of the anticipated crime.
 - Food: Mention of an orange coster's barrow. A coster is a street vendor of fruits and vegetables, often selling goods from a cart or barrow.
 - HOLMES & WATSON went through the city on a Saturday afternoon to hear Sarasate, a violinist, play at the St. James's Hall, and stopped for lunch of a sandwich and a cup of coffee, on the way.
 - Near the bank for which the burglary was planned, was the Vegetarian Restaurant.
 - Drink: Following the midnight capture of the criminals, HOLMES & WATSON sat over a glass of whisky and soda in Baker Street.
 - Vices: Holmes smoked three (black clay) pipes of tobacco in 50 minutes, pondering the case.
 - Other cases mentioned: IDEN and SIGN
 - Notable Quotables: "Omne ignotum pro magnifico" (everything unknown is grand) – SH
 - "There may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket. If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down." – SH
 - "I miss my rubber. It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had my rubber." – Bank Director Merryweather
 - Other interestings: This story shares a plot element with 3GAR and STOC, which is tricking someone to go elsewhere whilst the criminal takes advantage of the absence to commit the crime.
 - When all is said and done: "The man is nothing, the work is everything. (L'homme c'est rien — l'oeuvre c'est tout) It saved me from ennui." This was Holmes' modest reply to Watson's praise for solving the mystery. That explains the low fees charged in this case.
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